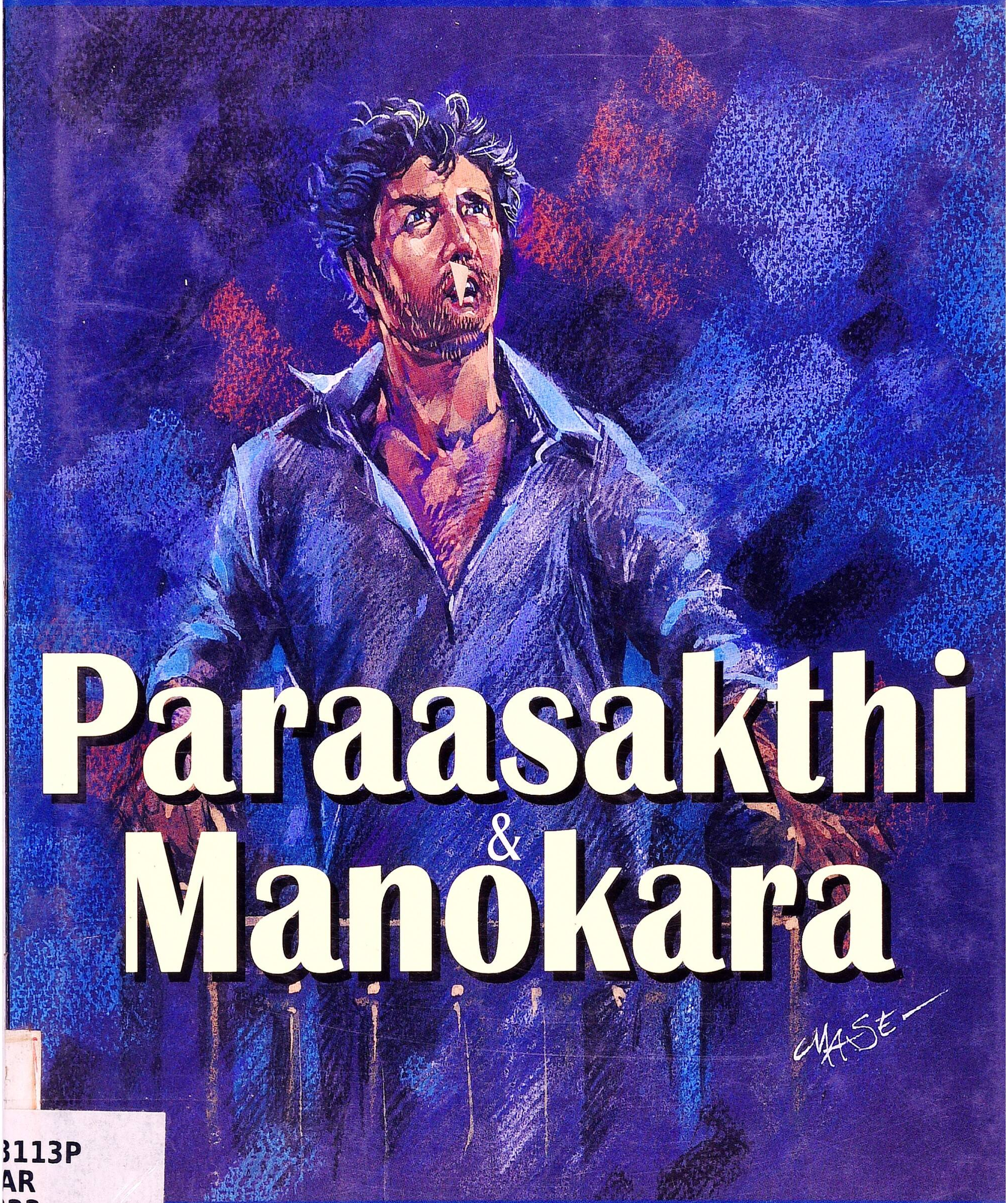
Kalaignar in English Translation



Paraasakthi & Manokara

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BHARATHIAR UNIVERSITY

In terms of the genre, Paraasakthi and Manokara along with the Tale of the Anklet, and other works of lesser dimensions – Rajakumari, Abimanyu, Manthiri Kumari, Maruthanattu Ilavarasi, etc., – represent Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi's distinct contribution to dramatic literature in Tamil, albeit they were written for cinematic productions. As film scripts, these works were immensely popular, ushering in a new era of Tamil movies. They provided a turning point and opened up new directions that were instinctively followed by succeeding film-makers. These compositions heralded a new trend in film-making in Tamil, turning the films into blockbusters, primarily on the strength of plots and dialogues

Among these, Paraasakthi is polemically structured, echoing the passionate voice of the dramatist against the social evils and the deeprooted superstitions that had been eating into the vitals of the contemporary Tamil society. The realistic portrayal of the plight of women, especially widows and the atrocities committed by priests and godmen in the name of religion and also the selfishness and avarice of the blackmarketeers has given Paraasakthi a significance that goes far beyond its success as a film script. The moving portrayal endows it with an edificatory value that shows Kalaignar's disapproval of the concept of 'art for art's sake'.

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Kalaignar in English Translation

Paraasakthi & Manokara

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8822

Bharathiar University
Coimbatore, India

MACMILLAN

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M. Karunanidhi
Chief Minister

Secretariat
Chennai - 600 009
Date: 12.05.2009

Foreword

I am extremely happy to know that Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, has taken the initiative to bring out a selection of my writings in English.

Bharatidasan, a formidable revolutionary poet, instilled in the Tamils an intense love for Tamil in such exhortations as

May you thunder, O Conch!
That the never diminishing Tamil
Is our life-breath and our prosperity.

Periyar E.V. Ramasamy and Perarignar Anna devoted their entire lives to promote among the Tamils an awareness of the dignity of their race. Following in their footsteps, from my childhood to this day I have immersed myself in the task of writing in order to keep the Tamil youth ever vigilant because of my desire that the Tamil land and the Tamil society should progress rising to the level of the rest of mankind. With this end in view, my writings have taken numerous forms such as poetry, drama, fiction, essay, epistle and travelogue.

Many have admiringly observed and continue to observe that my literary output has also contributed to the onward march of the Tamils in several spheres. In such a context, let me unreservedly and to my heart's content praise Bharathiar University, especially its Vice Chancellor, Dr G. Thiruvasagam, for his efforts to publish the most significant of those writings in English.

My thoughts have always centred round the idea that the Tamils should awaken and that the Tamil land should achieve worldwide progress. May these translations effectively serve that cause dear to my heart!

To
Dr G. Thiruvasagam
Vice Chancellor
Bharathiar University
Coimbatore

(M. Karunanidhi)

Vice Chancellor's Note

There is a close parallel between the nationalist Tamil poet Subramania Bharathi (after whom this University is named) and Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi in that both of them have a deep-rooted conviction in art being an agent of social transformation and the writings of both seek to release people from the shackles of slavery and show them the way of dignity and self-respect.

Bharathiar firmly believed that at the root of all social problems lay the evil of the caste system. All his life, he stressed that there were only two castes - the righteous and the unrighteous, the former superior and the latter inferior. A standing example of the might of the pen over the sword, Bharathiar's writings played a very significant role not only in gaining freedom for India from foreign yoke but also in unfettering his countrymen from the utterly dehumanizing beliefs and practices of the Indian society.

Kalaignar, remaining in the forefront of the fight against social inequality in all its forms, is a writer with ingrained social consciousness and has fathered numerous social reforms as the head of the government and as the leader of a political party, thanks to which people from the sections of the society once looked down as being incapable of thought and knowledge are today intellectuals, professionals and leaders of men.

A grand fusion of Periyar, Anna and Bharathiar, Kalaignar stands as a towering personality. Kalaignar now at 86, age has not withered his intellect nor has time made his writings stale.

Determined to secure a presence for Tamil literature and culture on the global scene, this University has already translated Bharathi's poems into English and conferred the"Bharathi Tamil Chemmal"award on Kalaignar in 2007, the University's Silver Jubilee year. The present endeavour, translation of Kalaignar's works into English, is a major step towards realizing this goal.

G. Thiruvasagam

Prologue

Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi's literary works in English translation should constitute a gift of the Tamil language to world literature.

In so far as Kalaignar is both a visionary writer and an active practitioner of his vision, he is a phenomenon unto himself, standing a rung or two above his fellow artists of all genres.

Kalaignar's significance in the history of Tamil literature primarily lies in his restoration and renewal of the pristine glory of Tamil, the language that is the mother of the Dravidian family of languages and that is one of the primary classical languages of the world.

Kalaignar's creativity began to manifest in his concern for the ethnic identity of the Tamils and the aesthetic exuberance of the Tamil language, and today it has matured into a seminal contribution to world literature.

Looked at the need for winning international recognition for Tamil literature, especially in the context of the other pan-Indian language, Sanskrit, enjoying worldwide attention and study, the present translations of Kalaignar's selected works into English are an attempt in the right direction.

Such of these translations are also a need of the hour for the Tamil language to demonstrate its capacity for indestructibility and rejuvenation, at this hour of the prognosticatory threat of the social scientists that globalization would in its wake see the languages of ethnic communities either wear off or die out.

Kavipperarasu Vairamuthu

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Introduction

Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi, born in 1924 in a hamlet of Thanjavur in the southern part of India, has eminently succeeded in making spectacular contributions both as a statesman and as a man of letters. His has been a full life providing ample space for diplomacy, social reformation and creative writing. Neither a philosopher nor a full-fledged academic living in an ivory tower, he has the courage and the wisdom to think and to act remarkably. A prolific writer endowed with unusual powers of observation and meditation, he has been ceaselessly adorning his beloved Mother Tamil with a steady stream of writings, leaving no genre untouched. It may be poetry or prose, song or verse, essay or story, play or fiction, social novel or historical novel, creative writing or criticism, memoir or autobiography, script for a film or a play, broadcast or speech – he can handle it with astonishing ease. What he has written till today may run to more than fifty volumes of 300 to 400 pages each.

What Karunanidhi states in the first volume of his autobiography about the year in which he was born is a telling comment on the ethos of the times as well as on the political, social and cultural forces that moulded his world-view. That was a year that witnessed momentous events. Lenin, the supreme architect of the communist revolution in Russia, died and Stalin came to power. Trotsky's advocacy of violent worldwide revolution was abandoned in favour of Stalin's plan for *"socialism in one country"* and the communist leaders decided to adapt the movement to the differing situations in various countries. Turkey became a republic under the presidentship of Kemal Ataturk during whose fifteen-year reign, the country's political and economic structure as well as its religious and social bases was totally transformed. Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, written during his incarceration in Bavaria, preaching anti-semitism, power worship and disdain for morality and outlining his strategy for world domination later became the bible of

the Nazi party. Since all the empires had been weakened by the first world war, many colonies boldly rose in revolt against them.

When Nazism, Fascism and Communism were becoming prominent in the West, Gandhian ideology started taking shape in India. It was in 1924 that Gandhiji, released from prison, became the President of the Indian National Congress and Jawaharlal Nehru was elected its General Secretary. India had awakened from its deep slumber and Gandhiji's appearance on the political scene electrified the Indian masses. The Belgaum Congress meet had the party's future course of action mapped out. Though most of the Indian political leaders were unanimous in their view that the British should be driven away from the country, they were hopelessly divided with regard to the strategies to be developed for dealing with the foreign power. The labour unions in the country were gradually becoming stronger and stronger. The feudal lords and zamindars were waging a losing battle against the tillers of the soil. If in the south seeds were sown for organized fights for social justice, in the north there appeared signs of disruption of communal harmony.

It was in 1924 that Periyar E.V. Ramasami planned an epic battle against the evil of untouchability that later earned him the title of Vaikkam Hero. Besides laying a firm foundation for the labour movement in Tamilnadu, Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundara Mudaliyar became a fierce fighter for the country's freedom. Finally, Karunanidhi significantly adds that it was the year in which "the revolutionary of revolutionaries, who dispelled the thousand-year-old darkness of the Tamil land," Arignar Anna, was a high school student equipping himself for the historic role he was going to play.

In this chronicle he is able to identify, of course with the benefit of hindsight, the intellectuals and men of action who later became his models as well as those against whom he had to define himself. Though all those personalities, movements, parties and ideologies might have attracted his attention at an impressionable age, he was going to choose Periyar and not Gandhiji, Arignar Anna and not Jawaharlal Nehru, the party wedded to Dravidian ideals and not the Congress, Periyar's Marxism and not Nehruvian socialism, and Tamilnadu and not India. To him, as to his guides and companions in the Dravidian Movement, the social and cultural emancipation of the Dravidians was of greater importance than even the political freedom of the country.

Even as a fourteen-year-old adolescent, Karunanidhi was captivated by the self-respect movement of Periyar E.V. Ramasami, whose fiery speeches and writings exerted an irresistible influence on several thousands of young men and women of Tamilnadu during the early decades of the twentieth century. To the politically,

socially, economically and culturally oppressed of the Tamil land, Periyar appeared as a new messiah who could save them from the atrocities perpetrated against them in the name of religion. His words and deeds, ideas and activities, principles and practices took the southern part of India by storm as he travelled the length and breadth of it tirelessly, asking the Dravidians to become aware of their racial identity and to boldly fight for their release from the shackles of slavery, superstition and inferiority complex which, in his view, had been the handiwork of an alien race. The young Karunanidhi was one of his prize catches.

If Periyar's thoughts made an indelible impression on him, Arignar Anna's powerful oratory became a perennial source of inspiration. He thoroughly soaked himself in Anna's speeches and writings, committed numerous admirable utterances of his to memory and revelled in quoting them as often as possible. When it came to his own speeches, he didn't slavishly imitate Anna but scrupulously developed a distinct style of his own. If Anna's ornate and colourful prose is almost verse and if every paragraph of his can be turned into a *viruttappā* by a few slight modifications, Karunanidhi's prose is punchy, heavily ironic and full of witticisms. If every sentence in the former's speech, having a lyrical charm of its own, is a case of "linked sweetness long drawn out," every sentence in the latter's speech moves fast and quickly reaches its carefully planned climax. If Anna's mastery of Tamil prose is almost unsurpassed, every speech of Karunanidhi is a sparkling performance. One would be reminded of the comparison Dryden draws between Demosthenes and Cicero:

> One warms you by degrees; the other sets you on
> fire all at once and never intermits his heat. …
> One persuades, the other commands.

Of all the modern poets, it was Bharatidasan, the organ voice of the Dravidian movement, who won his heart by a poetry that galvanized the Tamils into action. He can use Bharatidasan's similes, phrases, lines and whole poems to dramatic effect in his own speeches and dialogues for films. Inspired by Bharatidasan's play *Iraṇiyaṉ allatu Iṇaiyaṟṟa Vīraṉ*, he reconstructed the myths relating to Ravana, Vali, Hiranya and Indrajit. The Dravidian stance on many more legends, myths, literary representations and historical personages was later exquisitely articulated by Karunanidhi in different genres and modes.

Kalaignar's lack of college education or of classroom learning of ancient Tamil writings never stood in the way of his becoming an accomplished writer and competing with the university wits of his time. Energetic and strenuous self-schooling more than made up for it. Plunging into studies of classical and modern Tamil works, he got as much out of them as any contemporary Tamil scholar

could. He took to *Tolkāppiyam, Tirukkuṟaḷ, Eṭṭuttokai, Pattuppāṭṭu, Cilappatikāram, Maṇimēkalai, Kaliṅkattupparaṇi* and Sundaraṉār's *Maṉōṉmaṇiyam* just as fish take to water, and a sound knowledge of these stood him in good stead by shaping his vision of life and having quite an impact on the texture of his prose and poetry. Besides writing learned expositions of some of these texts, he could provide new renderings of many of these into lucid modern Tamil so that they could easily reach the masses. Because of his re-presentations of *Tirukkuṟaḷ* in more than one form, Tiruvalluvar became a household name in Tamilnadu.

There is no simple yardstick with which the performance of any writer can be assessed. It has to vary from group to group if not from individual to individual for there are writers and writers. Their missions vary; their methods differ. Gandhiji was a prolific writer but would never claim the title of an artist. Among those that have produced many works of lasting value, there have been political revolutionaries such as Lenin, Trotsky and Mao Tse-Tung, political theorists such as Hobbes, Thomas Paine and Karl Marx, statesmen such as Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill and Malraux, philosophers such as Voltaire, Bertrand Russell and Sartre, activists such as Mahatma Gandhi, Periyar E.V. Ramasami and Martin Luther King and scientists such as Charles Darwin, Julian Huxley and Einstein. The writings of these can't be measured against those of creative artists such as Flaubert, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, who firmly believed that artistry was of primary importance and that their loyalty to language came before everything else.

Karunanidhi is almost equally split between his responsibilities to art and politics. He may be in or out of power; he may be the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu or the Leader of the Opposition but his creative vigour shows no signs of abating. The older he grows, the more voluminous the literary output happens to be. For the life, career and achievement of Karunanidhi, we can find three amazingly close parallels in contemporary world histoy: Arthur Koestler, Pablo Neruda and Wole Soyinka. Koestler, who, interestingly begins his autobiography with an account of what happened in different parts of the world on his birthday, was a communist when he was in his twenties, left the party during the Stalin purge trials, became an influential spokesman of the non-communist left and is now remembered for his writings characterized by an impressive journalistic style and a sense of commitment. Neruda earned a name as a poet, diplomat and communist leader, received the Nobel Prize for literature while serving as ambassador to France and is known for his highly personal poetry in the collection *Twenty Love Poems and One Song of Despair* and for his writings that glorify his home country's landscape

and condemn the exploitation of the Red Indians. Soyinka, a Nigerian revolutionary, playwright, poet and novelist, has won international acclaim for his writings which combine Western and Yoruba traditions.

Karunanidhi's writings, dashed off in the white heat of inspiration in the midst of a hectic schedule, are in Tamil, at once a classical and modern language that has, because of several centuries of constant use, become a supple medium of prose and verse. They have to be made available in English if the world at large, especially the West, has to recognize their power and glory.

Prof. P. Marudanayagam

I
Paraasakthi

Preface

In the long and illustrious history of Tamil cinema, the name of Dr Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi is inscribed in letters of gold. There was a time when his very name was synonymous with Tamil cinema. Prior to the film *Paraasakthi* (Mighty Goddess), released in 1952, he had scripted six films:

Rajakumari (The Princess)
Abhimanyu
Manthiri Kumari (The Minister's Daughter)
Marutha Nattu Ilavarasi (The Princess of Marutha Nadu)
Manamagan (The Bridegroom)
Devaki

The films were blockbusters of those days mainly because of the stories and dialogues penned by young Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi as he was popularly known then.

The people of Tamilnadu celebrated the national festival "Deepavali" (Festival of Lights) in 1952 with the release of a film which ushered in a new era of Tamil movies, providing a turning point, pointing to a new direction which was instinctively followed by succeeding film-makers. *Paraasakthi* was a sensational success. This time, the dynamic dialogues of M. Karunanidhi found a powerful and fitting voice which belonged to a virtual newcomer to cinema—P. C. Ganesan, who reached the summit of glory as an actor par excellence and received the prestigious "Padmashree" award. The combination of the two men of genius proved to be explosive and exceptional.

Paraasakthi, it may be said, is a projection of the personality of the writer who wrote the story, dialogue and script. The story revealed the state of the Tamil society of the 1950's. The dialogue expressed in the strongest possible terms the anxiety and agony of the protagonist about the evils existing in the post-

Independence Tamilnadu. It may not be an exaggeration to say that Dr Kalaignar has contributed to the Tamil society through his varied themes what George Bernard Shaw had done to the British society. He has shown a mirror that reflected the reality.

The patron of Tamil cinema, hitherto exposed only to historical and religious themes, found himself a witness to the wickedness of the contemporary society. The indifference of man to the sufferings of his fellowmen; the plight of women, especially widows; the atrocities of priests and godmen committed in the name of God and religion; the selfishness and avarice of traders and black marketeers; the menace of rowdyism - all these shocking realities of the society stared him in the face. He sat up to ponder over these nagging social problems. For the first time, perhaps, a movie moved his heart so much that he could hear the voice of his own conscience. He asked himself, as did the writer, how best he could help in healing the social sickness.

Not all writers are idealists and not all idealists are writers. Dr Kalaignar is a unique exception. In all his movies, he has given expression to his ideals. *Paraasakthi* envisaged an ideal Tamil society sans selfishness, sans ignorance, sans inequality and violence. Unlike the other writers and idealists, Dr Kalaignar, through sheer consistency and hard work, leadership qualities and political acumen, attained a position in which he can pursue his ideals towards founding an ideal Tamilnadu. *Paraasakthi* was his inspiration and aspiration. If anyone wants to know about the man and his ideals, he or she must read his *Paraasakthi*.

Dr V. Krishnan
Reader in English (Retd)
Government Arts College
Coimbatore

Characters

Chandrasekaran	-	A judge
Gnanasekaran	-	His younger brothers
Gunasekaran	-	
Kalyani	-	Their younger sister
Manickam	-	Their father
Thangappan	-	Kalyani's husband
Saraswathy	-	Chandrasekaran's wife
Parvathi	-	Kalyani's neighbour
Vimala	-	In love with Gunasekaran
Venu	-	A local rowdy
Narayana Pillai	-	A black marketeer
Kantha	-	His wife
Karuppan	-	His servant
A priest		

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Text of the Play

Scene 1

Madurai

A small marriage hall packed with guests

A betrothal ceremony about to take place

A traditional dance in progress, the song depicting the glory of south India

The song and the dance come to an end.

Thangappan, the bridegroom, addresses the gathering.

Thangappan: Respected elders and friends!

I am sure you have enjoyed the blend of the melodious song and the delightful dance. It is a pity that the children of this beautiful country, instead of lingering on the lap of our motherland, leave her for far-off countries. I am reminded of the woeful words of our wise mentor. What makes the sea water saltish in taste? It is because the poor people of this rich land go to other countries in search of livelihood. The briny tears of these benign souls have mingled with the sea, making it saltish. Take, for instance, my prospective bride Kalyani. Her three elder brothers are in Rangoon right now. She had never seen their faces since they left when they were very young and she was yet a little child. Lakhs and lakhs of men and women with their families sweat it out on the rubber plantations in Malaysia, Africa and Lanka. They should return to our motherland. The song you heard makes a strong plea for it.

Scene 2

Rangoon

The residence of Kalyani's three elder brothers – Chandrasekaran, Gnanasekaran and Gunasekaran.

Gunasekaran, the youngest, is sleeping on his bed.

Gnanasekaran, his elder brother, comes.

Gnanasekaran: What, still asleep? Wake up brother!

(Gunasekaran pretends sleeping, puts the pillow over his head, annoyed at the disturbance)

Wake up, you lazybones!

(Turns on the radio, raising the volume)

Come on, Kumb Karna! Wake up!

Gunasekaran: Oh, leave me alone brother, please! Don't disturb my sleep.

(Chandrasekaran, the eldest brother, comes)

Chandrasekaran: Well, well, started already with the daybreak?

Gnanasekaran: Brother, Guna woke up just now.

Gunasekaran: (sits up) No, no brother. I woke up at five thirty!

Gnanasekaran: He lies, brother!

Chandrasekaran: Gunasekaran, don't lie. I know you don't even want to see the rising sun. All right, now. I have received this from home.

Gunasekaran: What's that? Sister's photograph?

Chandrasekaran: Father has written a letter. He has fixed up sister's marriage.

Gunasekaran: (delighted) Hurrah! When are we going home?

Chandrasekaran: I have booked our tickets over the phone. Expecting the reply. (moves towards his wife Saraswathy).

Gunasekaran: *Anni*, good news! Kalyani is getting married, you know?

Gnanasekaran: *Anni* knows it already, I'm sure.

(Chandrasekaran goes and stands beneath the portrait of his wife's father. His eyes moisten, as he looks up at the portrait.)

Saraswathy: What's this? Your sister is getting married, but you are sad?

Chandrasekaran: No, I'm moved by the portrait of your father. He made all the arrangements for our wedding. But now, he is no more.

Saraswathy: Don't worry, your father is there, isn't he?

Chandrasekaran: Whatever it is, your father rescued our family from ruins. We grew up under his patronage, playing on his lap.

(They sit for coffee)

Gnanasekaran: (To Gunasekaran) Put down that coffee cup, will you? You haven't brushed your teeth!

Chandrasekaran: Gnanasekaran, leave him alone.

(to Gunasekaran) Go ahead, drink your coffee.

Gunasekaran: We must get a nice gift for Kalyani. What's it going to be?

Chandrasekaran: Kalyani has our dear hearts throbbing for her. What better gift can we ever give her?

(The phone rings)

Ah, there's the phone ringing (picks up the receiver); yes, Chandrasekaran speaking.

Voice: Enquired about tickets, sir?

Chandrasekaran: Yes.

Voice: How many, sir?

Chandrasekaran: Four tickets.

Voice: O no, sorry, impossible.

Chandrasekaran: Impossible? Can't you do something, please?

Saraswathy: Look, a renowned Barrister, trying to please a booking clerk!.

Voice: It's wartime, sir.

Chandrasekaran: (Sighing) All right, book whatever you can. An important wedding we can't afford to miss.

Voice: Only one ticket per family. We have only three hundred tickets. We can offer only one ticket, sir.

Chandrasekaran: (disappointed) All right, book that one ticket, please.

(hangs up)

Gnanasekaran: What's the problem, brother?

Chandrasekaran: There are only three hundred tickets for the ship leaving tomorrow, but only one ticket per family. A golden day in our younger sister's life! It's not for all of us to see her wedding.

Saraswathy: Then who is to go?

Gunasekaran: (with excitement) Let me go!

Chandrasekaran: (Taking a good look at Gunaseakaran) Gnanasekaran, pack up the suitcase, put in the sarees and jewels bought for our sister, and see Gunasekaran off. (Gnanasekaran looks upset)

Gnanasekaran, why do you worry? We'll all go soon.

Gnanasekaran: But, brother, what if the war situation worsens?

Chandrasekaran: (with confidence) We'll go somehow.

Saraswathy: I have bought half a dozen sarees and blouses for Kalyani. Can you put them in the suitcase?

Gnanasekaran: If it is for sister, he'll carry them on his head. It's OK, give them.

(Gunasekaran prepares to leave)

Scene 3

In Madurai, Kalyani is sitting in front of the mirror, dressed in bright bridal saree. Tears roll down her cheeks.

Kalyani: Have you forgotten me brother? How unfortunate I am!

Having lost my mother whose face I do not remember, I was happy to have my brothers. They say a girl should be lucky to have one brother. But I have three brothers and yet no one here to witness my wedding.

Parvathi: Please, don't cry, Kalyani. Mischances happen to everybody, you know. Your brothers will surely come....

Kalyani: Not mischance, my misfortune.

Manickam: (coming in) Kalyani, my child, don't be sad. Your brothers will certainly make it. Come, it's time for the ceremony.

Kalyani: Father, how long I have been waiting for my brothers!

Why has none of them come to see me in my wedding dress?

Manickam: They will, they will. If not today, certainly tomorrow.

Kalyani: (anxiously) Father, how about postponing the wedding?

Manickam: This is the auspicious day fixed by the priest. It isn't good to miss it. People might mistake it. Come, child, all the folks are waiting.

(They go to the hall. The wedding ceremonies proceed and conclude in the traditional manner).

Scene 4

Kalyani and her husband Thangappan are singing joyously in a beautiful garden.

Scene 5

Rangoon

Gnanasekaran: (Reading aloud the newspaper)

"World War intensifies. Japan gearing up for fresh onslaughts. Enemy spotted along the coastline of Rangoon. Ships unable to reach India".

Brother, if father and sister hear this disturbing news, they'll be terribly upset… at a time when wedding preparations are on.

Chandrasekaran: You're right. Gunasekaran's ship hasn't reached Madras. How unlucky we are to miss our dear sister's wedding!

(The radio blares out the war news….)

"Heavy casualties reported in enemy bombardments. More than a thousand are reported to have been killed. People have started evacuating the city".

Saraswathy: How long can we live like this?

Gnanasekaran: Our very survival would be doubtful.

Chandrasekaran: No point in remaining here anymore. Let's move towards India, even if it is on foot.

(They prepare to leave)

Scene 6

Madurai

Kalyani and her husband Thangappan

Thangappan: Kalyani!

Kalyani: Yes, here I am.

Thangappan: Be quick, let's go

Kalyani: Why are you in a hurry?

(adjusting her saree, she comes out of her room, looks at her father who comes there.)

Father, we are going out.

Take care, my child.

(Parvathi comes)

Parvathi: Kalyani!

Kalyani: Yes, sister.

Parvathi: Whereto?

Manickam: Nothing. My son-in-law's story is being made into a film. They are going to witness the shooting of the film.

Parvathi: Why not? But…she is pregnant and should be careful while goint out.

Manickam: Maybe you're right. But she is very eager to go.

Let them go!

Kalyani: Only this once, sister.

Parvathi: (teasing her gently) All right, go. Your husband is most obliging, wait till your son comes to keep you in check!

Kalyani: (blushing) Oh, please!

Manickam: So you have predicted a son?

Parvathi: Not me! Both of them have decided that their son will be named 'Panneerselvam'!

Thangappan: Not only that, if it turns out to be a girl child, it will be named 'Nagamma'.

(they leave)

Manickam: How wise is my daughter! If only my sons were here to see how happy she is!

Scene 7

Madras

Gunasekaran, who has disembarked from the ship, is seen sitting inside a taxi.

A beggar approaches him.

Beggar: Please, sir!

Gunasekaran: Oh no! The first voice I hear in Tamilnadu!

Here..... (gives him a coin. A swarm of beggars dash towards him with begging bowls. He gives them coins)

Driver, let's go!

(The taxi pulls up in front of a bank. Gunasekaran gets inside and draws money from the cash counter. As he counts the currency, a young, attractive girl watches him through her handy mirror, applying lipstick. When he leaves for the hotel, she follows him. Gunasekaran drives to a hotel and checks in. After depositing his suitcase in the room, he comes out. Closes the door and walks to the reception to book his ticket for Madurai. After that he returns to his room. He is taken aback to see the young girl lying on the bed.)

Gunasekaran: O I beg your pardon! I've come to the wrong room, perhaps. All the rooms here look alike. Sorry, my fault.

The girl: It's all right. What's your room number?

Gunasekaran: Seven.

The girl: O my God! Seven? Mine is eight, the next one. Sorry, it's my fault.

(Pretends to leave the room, taking her bag)

Gunasekaran: It's all right, all right.

(The room boy brings coffee for Gunasekaran.)

Here, have some coffee. (offers the cup to the girl)

The girl: No, thanks!

Gunasekaran: Please, have it. I have to go to Madurai. I've missed the train.

The girl: Is that so? I too missed my train!

Gunasekaran: (with some hesitation) If you would excuse me,

I have to go to a movie. It's time.

The girl: Movie? I hate movies!

Guna: But why?

The girl: If they formed an association to close down the film industry, I'd be its chairperson. Bharatha Natyam is best suited to our culture. It would be better to go to such dance performances. I know a place where you can witness and enjoy good dance performance.

Shall we go?

Gunasekaran: You... are coming with me?

The girl: Come on, don't treat me like an alien. Would you not take me out if I were your sister? Don't mistake me. Please!.

Gunasekaran: All right. Let's go.

Scene 8

Inside a brothel.

A woman is singing and dancing.

Gunasekaran looks on half-heartedly.

While the dance is in progress, Jolly, the girl who accompanied Gunasekaran, offers him a drink.

He hesitates and then drinks it.

As the dance comes to an end, he feels giddy, his head becomes heavy and he swoons.

Jolly, with the help of the dancers and others, takes away all his cash, watch and other items on his person.

* * * *

Kalyani's house in Madurai

Kalyani, who is expecting a baby, is in labour pains.

A doctor is examining her.

Doctor: (Turning to Kalyani's father)

Here, get this medicine immediately, it's urgent. (Manickam rushes out with the prescription in hand.

Thangappan, Kalyani's husband, comes in)

Thangappan: How is she, uncle?

Manickam: Doctor wants this medicine immediately. Can you go and get it?

(Thangappan takes the prescription from him and rushes on his bicycle.)

Parvathi: (Coming out) You have been blessed with a grandson, Panneerselvam!

Manickam: (happy and excited, comes out, sees Thangappan about to turn the corner) Come back, son! Come back!

(As Thangappan turns the corner, a speeding car runs over him and he dies instantly. Manickam, shocked by the gory accident, suffers a heart attack, falls down dead. Kalyani is now a widow and an orphan.)

Scene 9

A street in Madras

Gunasekaran broods over his present plight.

Gunasekaran: O how I have been deceived! Crossing the ocean, I came with a heart filled with longing to see you, Kalyani, your husband and our dear father. That devil of a woman has poisoned my heart, fooled me and betrayed me. How I wish she had killed me instead! Now look at me, a vagabond, a beggar! Am I to present myself to my sister like this? Poverty, theft, cheating, prostitution, where? In this land of perennial rivers, prosperous green gardens! O my dear motherland! Why should you punish me like this? The way you torment destitutes and misfits? O my dear majestic land! When did you turn out to be a spider's web? O my dear Tamilnadu, that offers life and prosperity to those coming to you! Since when did you start exploiting your own children? O you golden land whose history is replete with the chronicles of valiant women! When did you close your eyes against prostitutes professing on your pathways? Mansions touching the sky and men without souls! Tall towers, low minds! O my Tamilnadu, is this your triumph? Your reputation? Your glory? Kalyani, you are there in Madurai, while I wallow on the streets of Madras, with a confused mind, an orphan, a dumb wretch! O Kalyani, Kalyani!.

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Scene 10

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From Burma thousands of refugees walk hopefully - towards India. The Japanese planes drop bombs on the human caravan. Chandrasekaran, Saraswathy and Gnanasekaran sustain injuries and they are admitted in a hospital. Chandrasekaran is frantically searching for Gnanasekaran.

Chandrasekaran: Doctor, could you tell me where I can find Gnanasekaran?

Doctor: Gnanasekaran? There's no one here with that name.

Chandrasekaran: Where else can I find him?

Doctor: I'm sorry. In the bombardment, only a few have survived. They are here. The others, I'm afraid, must have died.

Chandrasekaran: Oh no! Gnanasekaran, are you dead? Saraswathy, if father asks me about him, what can I tell him?

Saraswathy: Doctor, he is very much disturbed. Please advise him.

Doctor: Mr Chandrasekaran, pull yourself together. Be calm. Everything will be all right.

Scene 11

Madurai

Manickam Pillai's house.

A town crier makes an announcement.

Town crier: "Now hear this, now hear this!

The house of Manickam Pillai, at number six, Masikonar Street, will be sold in public auction tomorrow afternoon at 3'o clock. This is the order of the court!"

A bystander: Heard that, brother? What a tragedy! Manickam Pillai's three sons are well off in Rangoon. So he borrowed heavily and conducted his daughter's wedding in a grand manner. After that he is gone! Who knows what happened to the sons in Rangoon under Japanese bombardment? What about poor Kalyani? She has sold all her jewels and still couldn't save the house. Don't know what's in store for her!

Scene 12

Kalyani, with her child in her arms, sits near her house, sings through her tears.

Parvathi comes.

Parvathi: Kalyani, what's the use of crying like this?

Life must go on, dear child.

Kalyani: If someone can take care of this child, life can go on.

Parvathi: It's not the fault of the child.

Kalyani: Not the fault of the child, no. But if I fail to bring up the child because of poverty, that would be my fault, my sin.

Parvathi: Kalyani, listen to me. I have a small plot of land at the far end of the street. You can erect a small hut on it. Start a stall to make idlies and sell them. You can make a decent living.

Kalyani: What? You mean idly shop?

Parvathi: Yes. In our place, this is a suitable profession for widows and it's as good as a thasildar's.

Scene 13

Madras

A pawnbroker's shop

Gunasekaran, having lost all his money, is at a loss to know what to do.

He goes to the pawnbroker with some hesitation.

Pawnbroker: Hello, welcome, welcome! What is it that you want?

Gunasekaran: Sir. I want nothing. But can you take these pants and give me some money?

Pawnbroker: (Takes the pants and examines them)

Gunasekaran: It's brand new, sir. It cost me fifty rupees for stitching it. Let me have some money to buy my train ticket for Madurai.

Pawnbroker: Who cares where you go? Bombay or Madras? I can give you only eight annas.

(Gunasekaran, disappointed, moves; goes to a house nearby. A man is sitting on the verandah)

Gunasekaran: Sir, I came to Madras by ship. Someone has stolen my money, suitcase, everything.

The man: O is that so? Why don't you go and give a complaint to the police?

Gunasekaran: I have to go to Madurai. If you could help me....

The man: Get away, fellow!

* * * *

(It is night, Gunasekaran is sleeping on the verandah of a house. The home-owner comes out, looks at the man sleeping. He then brings a bucketful of water and pours it on him)

Homeowner: You, scoundrel! Who asked you to sleep here?

Gunasekaran: (fully drenched) Sir, pour some more water, will you? And give me a soap; I haven't taken a bath for days!

Homeowner: You bloody thief! (Turning to his wife) Look at this fellow's audacity!

Gunasekaran: (To the woman) Please, *Amma*, you look like goddess Lakshmi. Would you be watching like this, if I were your brother?

The Woman: See! The tramp is playing brother sentiment!

Homeowner: Why not? He'll be playing so many other things too.

You better go inside.

(She goes inside)

Get away, you! Come on, out!

(Gunasekaran moves away, goes to the pavement and tries to sleep)

A policeman comes.

Policeman: Hey, you! You're a pickpocket, aren't you?

Why do you blink?

Gunasekaran: If you wake up a sleeping man, wouldn't he blink?

Policeman: You are a pickpocket, aren't you?

Gunasekaran: (puts his hands into his pant pockets, empties them).

No, sir, I'm an empty pocket!

Policeman: Then why the hell are you sleeping here?

Gunasekaran: Should I not sleep here? Am I not entitled to sleep here? Even the cattle do. Yes, sir. In Madras, man has become an animal.

Policeman: Are you referring to me?

Gunasekaran: No, sir. Not you! The rickshaw puller who drags it like a horse, who lives all the time on the pavement with his family like a street dog, I am talking about him. Here, in Madras, man is a 'manimal'!

Policeman: All right! When you become the Mayor of Madras, you can transform animals into human beings!

Gunasekaran: Why - even now there are many animals in human shape. (moves away)

Ah, me! (seeing a street tap) God has shown me the thirst quencher!

(Turns on the tap, but there is no water)

Paraasakthi, look at your son's plight! He has no food to eat, no more clothes to wear, no place to sleep in .... *Paraasakthi*!.

Scene 14

Madurai. Kalyani at her idli shop. A customer is eating.

Customer: Three rupees, so far. I'll pay you tomorrow.

(A creditor comes there)

Creditor: Kalyaniamma, Kalyaniamma! If you can't repay your loans, why do you take loans?

Kalyani: Please, bear with me for two more days. I'll repay the money as soon as my customers pay me.

Creditor: No, no, impossible! I can't wait any longer.

(Venu, a local rowdy, comes)

Venu: Hey, who the hell are you troubling a poor woman? Can't you see a gentleman standing here?

Creditor: O pardon me, maharaj!

Venu: Pardon me, my foot! Here, how much does she owe you?

Creditor: Ten rupees, sir.

Venu: Here, take this. (gives him ten rupees)

Kalyani: Brother, please, don't trouble yourself, don't pay him.

Venu: It's all right. Let it be. Give me some idlies to eat.

(Kalyani goes inside to fetch him idlies)

Venu's pal: Crazy dogs! Bothering a helpless woman like this.

Kalyani, why do you borrow money from such indecent wretches?

Kalyani: What can I do brother? I have to run the shop for my existence.

Venu: All right, do what I say. You need not pay me the ten rupees. Serve idlies for the two of us every night. That would be four annas, you know? When you have supplied for ten rupees, tell me. I'll give more money, if you are honest.

Venu's Pal: Well said! We have to help poor people like Kalyani!

Scene 15

A street in Madras

Driven by hunger, Gunasekaran raves like a madman. An old woman, with a basket on her head, comes there selling fruits.

Woman: Oranges, apples! (looking at Gunasekaran) Want some fruits?

Gunasekaran: No, I have no money.

Woman: No money? (keeping the basket down)

All right, have an eye on the basket. Le me go and drink some water from the tap.

(Gunasekaran, his hunger taking over the better side of him, takes an apple from the basket and eats it hurriedly. The woman returns)

Hey, you! why did you take my fruit?

Gunasekaran: I'm hungry. I need something to eat.

Woman: Is that so? You steal my fruits because you're hungry? You rascal! I go from street to street selling these for a living. Now you come and snatch it away!

Gunasekaran: Wouldn't you forgive me, if I were your son?

Woman: Only God will punish you!

Gunasekaran: He never heard my cries of agony. He is nothing but a stone.

Woman: Look, all my fruits are in the mud. How I wish to curse you! You mad fellow? Give me the money for the fruits or I'll knock off your teeth!

Gunasekaran: Where am I to go for money? If you want, I'll carry the basket and sell the fruits for you. You need not pay me anything, please.

Woman: You, selling the fruits? You and your monkey face! Look at what you've done. Littered my basket with orange peelings. All right, take the basket. Come on. do it!

(A madman comes running. He snatches the basket from Gunasekaran, takes the fruits and runs away munching the fruits. A policeman, who has been chasing the madman, comes and encounters the madman. The madman stops, stares at the policeman who is already frightened. The madman runs away, chased by the policeman. The vendor woman is lying on the street. Gunasekaran is stupefied.)

Gunasekaran: What a crazy world! Only the mad and the cheats can survive here. Did I steal for buying a dhoti for myself? Or to have a house of my own? To appease my hunger I stole a fruit. And what did I get? Blows and banter! The madman gobbles up all the fruits but the world fears him, lets him get away! It's time I too adopted the crazy ways.

(A young girl walks along the street. Two Road Romeos tease her)

First fellow: Hey, hey, hey! Look at this stylish little chick!

Can't we have a smashing thing like this?

Second fellow: Yeah, we can have her, for money!

(Gunasekaran, enraged, darts at the two fellows and beats them up. They are scared of him and stand there shivering.)

Gunasekaran: (looking at them threateningly)

Cigarette?

(One of them offers him a cigarette with shivering hands and the other hands over a matchbox. Gunasekaran lights the cigarette. The two Romeos run away.)

Success! From now on I am a madman, a cheat! (He begins to act like a madman, singing and dancing.)

Scene 16

Gunasekaran, successfully pursuing his assumed role as a madman, manages to reach Madurai and comes to what was once his father's house. Finding the house under lock and key, he makes enquiries. Parvathi happens to be nearby, giving alms to the beggars there.

Parvathi: (mistaking Gunasekaran for a beggar)

Oh, you're there. Let me come to you. Here, take this.

Gunasekaran: No, please, no! I'm not a beggar. I came looking for Manickam Pillai residing in this house. Do you know where he is now?

Parvathi: You mean, Kalyani's father?

Gunasekaran: (excitedly) Yes, yes!

Parvathi: (her voice choking) He is dead.

Gunasekaran: (Shocked) Oh no! Dead!

(Slowly recovering) What about Kalyani?

Parvathi: Kalyani? She is like my own daughter. Such a beautiful doll she was! Her marriage went on well in a grand manner. But the cruel God didn't let her live happily. She is now a widow with a baby in her arms.

Gunasekaran: O God, God! Where is Kalyani now?

Parvathi: She is there at the end of the street. She runs a shop selling idlies. You are concerned about Kalyani so much. Who are you?

Gunasekaran: You won't understand if I tell you who I am.

(Like a frenzied man he goes in search of Kalyani.)

Scene 17

Kalyani's hut

Kalyani is singing a lullaby for the baby in the cradle.

Gunasekaran stands still, tears rolling down his cheeks, the pain in his heart unbearable.

The moving song runs like promising her that her three brothers would come with a cradle embedded with precious stones, carried on an elephant's back, followed by many gorgeous gifts; they would bring a silver satchel and diamond pencils to put him to school.

The song, in Kalyani's sad voice, multiplies his sorrow. He talks to himself.

Gunasekaran: How right you are, Kalyani! Your brothers would come in great style with gorgeous gifts. No, let me not destroy your delightful dreams. You must not recognize me in the madman's clothes. O how I wish the ship had floundered in the midsea! Have I come here to see you in this pitiable plight?

(goes towards a wayside resting stone)

This resting stone here will bear my heart's burden henceforth. This will be my home, my life. I will protect my sister and never leave her. I am my sister's shadow.

Scene 18

Venu, the local dada and some of his pals are playing cards.

First Man: All right, declare!

Venu: (placing his cards) Three kings!

First Man: (upset) If only I had three asses....

Venu: You would have a laundry perhaps!

First Man: Are you joking? I am not playing any more.

Venu: So you are all out. Don't worry. You can get back all the money you've lost.

First Man: But you need money for that. Why don't you give me some money?

Venu: Not a pie. Why are you upset? Your father has given the almirah key to you. Why do you worry?

First Man: The keys? He has given me the keys because I am a victim of epilepsy!

Venu: OK. Shall we go there?

First Man: Where?

(Venu takes him away)

Scene 19

Gunasekaran prattling like a madman.

Gunasekaran: Why don't they teach us to boil stones and sands for drinking?
(laughs loudly)
I am the king
Doubt it not!
Who's there? My learned ministers?
Come, sit here.
Let the dance begin....... dum dum dum!
(sings)
"Dance I will with Gopalan
Dance I will with Nandagopalan
My Venugopalan!"
Enough, enough I say!
Let the trail begin .... dum dum dum!
Manthriji,
Do we get the rains regularly?
Three spells in a month?
(As Minister)
"Maharaja, we have sent a lightning telegram
To the God of rains!"

Good, very good!
Who's there? What noise is this?
(As beggars)
"Maharaja, we are terribly hungry.
We are dying of hunger with family and all"
What? Hungry? Don't say that, you fool!
This is the land laden with gold and silver.
You beggars with burning stomachs,
Go and die happily.
A comet will surge in the sky... Zoooooommm!
What, no money?
Where are you?
What are you?
Carry a *kavadi* to the God at Vadapalani
(Takes a brick, puts it on his head)
Arohara!
Saravanama Sangeerthanam
Naga Parvatham
Rama Sangeerthanam
Govinda! Govinda! Hare Govinda!
(puts the brick on the resting stone and starts singing a *bhajan*.)

Kalyani: (Watching him from her hut)
Poor fellow! How mad he is!

Gunasekaran: (seeing her) Sister, sister, come here!

Kalyani: (laughing) Am I your sister, then?

Gunasekaran: Yes, you are! I wanted to tell you something.........

Kalyani: What is it?

Gunasekaran: You see, the thing is... well, will you give your son in marriage to my daughter?

Kalyani: (giggling) All right! What will you give for dowry?

Gunasekaran: We'll see that later. Please, give me my son-in-law.
I want to give him a kiss!

Kalyani: O No! I won't

Gunasekaran: Sister, please only one kiss. Won't you give him?
I promise, I'm not mad. I won't hurt your son.
I'm not mad, not mad.
(overcome by emotion)
Yes, I'm mad, I'm mad, mad!

Scene 20

A street

A vendor with a basket, selling eatables *'murukku'* and *'vada'*.

Vendor: *Murukku, vada! murukku, vada!*

(seeing Gunasekaran)

Want *murukku*?

Gunasekaran: Give me for three annas.

Vendor: Thank God! Didn't sell anything for three days!

(loudly) How many *vadas*? How many *murukkus*?

Gunasekaran: Vada for two annas, *murukku* for one anna.

(The vendor gives him some *vadas* and *murukkus*. Gunasekaran eats like a hungry wolf.)

Vendor: Mister, you have lucky hands, I suppose.

("Not my hands, my legs" gestures Gunasekaran)

Poor fellow, must be very hungry!

Eat, mister, eat!

A customer: Hey, *Murukku*, come here.

Vendor: Yes, sir, coming! Let me get my money from this gentleman. Mister, give me my money.

Gunasekaran: (Stops munching and begins to laugh)

Vendor: Why do you laugh?

Gunasekaran: (Laughs even louder)

Vendor: What, laughing again? I say, give me my money.

I have to go to other streets, you know?

Gunasekaran: What for? To pick up garbage?

Vendor: (impatient and angry) You scoundrel, give me my money!

Gunasekaran: Money? Hey, you want money? What for?

Vendor: Are you playing with me? You are trying to cheat me.

Do you know who I am?

Gunasekaran: I know! Would you give me some more for two annas?

Vendor: (pleased) Now you're talking! Here, take it.

(Gunasekaran starts eating)

All right, give me my money, it's getting late.

Gunasekaran: (looking dangerously furious)

You scoundrel!

(Chases away the vendor, takes his basket and walks. A neatly dressed gentleman comes. Gunasekaran approaches him.)

Sir, want some *murukku*?

Gentleman: Is it hot? Only *murukku*, no *vada*?

Gunasekaran: Yes sir, I have both!

Gentleman: Then give me this for one anna, and that for one anna.

Gunasekaran: (gesturing) Money first!

Gentleman: *Murukku* first!

Gunasekaran: Only for two annas? Enough for you?

Gentleman: Not enough, really. But you should be economical. Shouldn't spend too much. Here. I have bought for two annas, how about giving me something extra?

Gunasekaran: You stingy fellow! Asking for extra, like a beggar!

Take this (gives him a bit)

Come on, my money?

Gentleman: Money? Have you got change for one rupee?

Gunasekaran: What?

Gentleman: Change for one rupee?

Gunasekaran: Change? Asking me for change?

Give it to me (snatches the rupee)

Wonderful chance, don't let it go!

(looking at the gentleman)

How did you get this?

Gentleman: How did I get this? What do you mean?

Gunasekaran: (Acting like a Police Inspector)

You there, 803, take away this fat fellow!

(runs away with the rupee)

Gentleman: (Taking the basket) How lucky! He has left the basket!

(The vendor comes and tries to snatch the basket from the gentleman, who wouldn't let go the basket. In the melee, the vendor puts it on the gentleman's head. A policeman comes and thinking that it is the madman with the basket, hauls the gentleman away)

Scene 21

Kalyani's hut

Venu, the local thug, overcome by lust, knocks at the door.

Venu: (knocking) Kalyani! Kalyani!

Kalyani: (opening the door) Brother, it's you? Why this late hour? Come early hereafter.

Venu: I have come at the right time. Did you have good business today?

Kalyani: As usual, brother.

Venu: Mmm... got idlies?

Kalyani: Please wait, I'll bring in a minute.

Venu: Kalyani, we don't get rice easily these days. Why not add some wheat to the rice?

Kalyani: It can be done. But it will spoil the taste.

Venu: (implying something)

It is better to join something with something, than leave it alone. If wheat is added to rice, it will get you more profit.

Kalyani: How can you cheat for profit, brother?

Venu: (irritated) Why call me brother so often?

Kalyani: I have three brothers. unlucky that I am, I have not seen any of them. I feel like calling you my brother, as often as I can.

Venu: You crazy woman! So that's what makes you call me brother?

Kalyani: Brother, there's something strange in your behaviour!

Venu: This is not the way to show your affection, Kalyani!

Kalyani: Brother, this is not the way to behave with a lonesome woman.

Venu: You are right, Kalyani. An enchanting vine needs a tree to entwine. How nice it would be if you called me uncle or better still ...'lover'!

Kalyani: (alarmed) Stop it! I can't tolerate this any more!

Venu: Me too! Say 'yes' and I'll get you a nice house for this humble hut. You can throw away that dirty mat and sleep on a cozy cot!

(moves closer to her)

Kalyani: Stop there! Don't come any closer! How dare you think poor women will get caught in your net!

Venu: Frantic fear of love are acts of cowards, my dear!

Kalyani: If you touch me, I'll raise an alarm!

Venu: Go ahead! Do it! Your wailing will be music to me!

(He grabs Kalyani and tries to kiss her. She struggles and shouts for help. Gunasekaran, on hearing her pleas for help, darts inside the hut. Venu, taken aback by the entry of the madman, leaves her and blurts out something to Gunasekaran with folded hands)

Gunasekaran: Enough of your greetings, brother-in-law!

(Beats him and chases him out)

Kalyani: What would have happened to me, mad brother, if you had not come? What brings you here?

Gunasekaran: I came to see you, sister.

Kalyani: (calms down) Mad brother, will you eat some idlies?

Gunasekaran: Mmm... You will demand money!

Kalyani: No, I don't want money.

Gunasekaran: If you know who I am, you will never ask for money!

Kalyani: (smiling) All right, who are you?

Gunasekaran: I am ... I am... (realizing his haste)

I am the king under the tree!

Kalyani: I'll bring you idlies!

Gunasekaran: No, no idlies ... only ... chutney!

Kalyani: Don't worry. I'll bring both (goes inside the kitchen)

Gunasekaran moves towards the cradle and gently kisses the sleeping baby. Tears well up in his eyes.

Kalyani: Mad brother, why are you crying?

Gunasekaran: (composing himself) Well, all my subjects are living happily, and so I'm crying!

(drops a few coins in the plate and rushes out)

Kalyani: Brother! Mad brother! Come back!

Scene 22

The next day

Venu's pals are seen talking in front of a petty shop. Gunasekaran is brushing his teeth at the street tap.

First Pal: Hey, where have you been last night?

Second Pal: Playing cards all through the night. Oh, my eyes are burning!

First Pal: Never mind your eyes, did you win any money?

Second Pal: Where is Venu? Haven't seen him this morning.

First Pal: He had been to that Kalyani's shop, you know? Played some mischief with her. Nothing worked. She thrashed him like anything!

Second Pal: Beat it, will you? Why do you bother?

Now, did you hear this? There's a fellow stuttering about, disguised like a madman. He is Kalyani's secret lover, they say!

(On hearing this, Gunasekaran becomes furious. He goes and beats up the pals.)

Gunasekaran: What did you say? Speaking ill of my sister Kalyani? She is my sister, you hear me? My sister! Let me go now and tell her who really I am!

(Runs towards Kalyani's hut)

Scene 23

Kalyani's hut

Kalyani, feeling insecure and unsafe, has left the place.

Gunasekaran searches for her frantically and is overcome by fear and anxiety.

Gunasekaran: Widowed by circumstances, disowned by the society, my sister is struggling for survival.

(He goes out in search of Kalyani. He stops a passerby)

Gunasekaran: Sir, did you see a widow with a child in her arms?

Passerby: O you know that woman, then? You see the crowd over there? A woman and her child are dead .... suicide, maybe. Go and see.

Gunasekaran: No, oh no! Kalyani!

(He ploughs through the crowd of people, and there on the ground finds a woman's body with a dead child still in her arms.

But it is not Kalyani.

He pulls himself together and slowly walks back)

Scene 24

Chandrasekaran had come to Tiruchy with his wife.

He is now Justice M.C. Sekar.

A man: Any news about your brothers?

Chandrasekaran: (sighing) No, nothing at all!

The man: Do they know you have come to Tiruchy?

Chandrasekaran: I'm afraid, they don't know.

Saraswathy: How about going to the refuge camp?

Chandrasekaran: Yes, you're right, we are leaving tomorrow.

Scene 25

Narayana Pillai, a black marketeer, is checking the provisions he has been hoarding.

Karuppan, his assistant, is counting the bags.

Narayana Pillai: Sugar 20 bags, textile goods 30 bags.

Yarn 6 bags. So totally ...

Karuppan: Fifty-six!

Narayana Pillai: You idiot! I know that. I am calculating the profit we are going to make. Fifty-six, indeed!

Karuppan: Why worry about profits? If you sell them now, you'll get thirty thousand rupees!

Narayana Pillai: Why sell them now? We can do that later. They are not vegetables to perish. They are like a young maiden.

(His wife comes)

Narayana Pillai's wife: So they have started selling young maidens?

Karuppan: Yes, *Amma*! But the maidens cannot be stuffed in bags.

Narayana Pillai: Shut up, you idiot!

Narayana Pillai's wife: Why not, he will thrust even a ghost into a bag and sell it in the black market!

Narayana Pillai: I could marry you only because of my black market businesses. Don't ridicule the black market. It's all for money making, you know? Avvaiyar sang for food. Kamban wrote for gold coins. What else is it, if not black marketing?

(A Tamil scholar comes)

Narayana Pillai: What, Punditji?

Scholar: Mr Narayana Pillai, I am not a Tamil Pundit now. I am a CID officer. I heard you have bundles and bundles of ...

Narayana Pillai: (hastily) Who said? I am an honest businessman!

A VIP in town. I am the Chairman of the Sanmarga Sangam.

Karuppan: Bloody thieves.

Narayana Pillai: Who?

Karuppan: Boss, I kept four annas near the well. Somebody has taken them away!

Narayana Pillai: You idiot!

CID: Calm down, calm down! Mr Narayana Pillai, I meant bundles and bundles of books!

Narayana Pillai: (feeling relieved) You mean books? O yes, CID sir!

I have lots and lots of books.

(to Karuppan) You idiot! Get whatever books he wants from out of the shop. All right, CID sir, please get going!.

CID: Thank you!

Narayana Pillai: My pleasure!

(Kalyani, who had left Madurai, had managed to come to Tiruchy. Driven by hunger, exhausted, she comes and stands in front of Narayana Pillai's house)

Kalyani: Sir, please, I haven't had anything to eat for days. My child is starving. Give us something to eat.

Narayana Pillai: What's this? You seem to be young and you have started begging already. Who are you?

Kalyani: I am an orphan. I am willing to work as a servant-maid.

Narayana Pillai: In that case, are you willing to work in my house?

Kalyani: Yes sir, I am ready.

Narayana Pillai: (To Karuppan) You idiot! Take her inside.

Scene 26

Tiruchy Railway Station

Gunasekaran, who has come to Tiruchy in search of his sister, is at a loss to know what to do.

He is hungry and desperate.

A young woman, Vimala, comes out of the station with her suitcase and a bag.

Gunasekaran offers to carry her luggage as a coolie. She consents. Suddenly he runs away with the luggage.

Vimala shouts "Thief, thief!"

A few men give him a chase. He throws away the suitcase and runs off with the bag which, he believes, contains food. He finally stops near a well at the back of a house. Making sure no one notices him, he sits on the parapet of the well, opens the food pocket in the bag, and begins eating. He takes a few mouthfuls, throws some food to the crows sitting around him. He, then, starts singing. In his song he praises the crows for their act of sharing food. He advises them not to behave like human beings who are selfish.

Vimala comes there following the voice.

On seeing her, Gunasekaran runs away.

She looks at the young man who has impressed her with his song and sentiments.

She smiles and says : "Funny stranger!"

Scene 27

Justice Sekar's house

Justice: My father is no more. My sister is a widow now.

She is in Madurai, living in poverty. Where, I do not know. My younger brother Gnanasekaran, I'm afraid is also dead.

A Reporter: Do you have their photographs now, sir?

Justice: We have Gnanasekaran's photo but not Kalyani's.

Scene 28

Narayana Pillai, the black marketeer, is making his plans to seduce Kalyani. Kantha, his wife, comes.

Kantha: How come you have so many books?

Narayana Pillai: All these books are for that CID pundit. He had read almost all the books I have - from *Kanthapuranam* to *Srivalli* cinema songs! Now we have more new books by Bharathidasan and Annadurai. By the way, Kantha, a new film has been released today - *Krishnaleela*.

Kantha: Let's go to the second show, then.

Narayana Pillai: I have seen the matinee show. Why don't you go and see?

Kantha: I'll go tomorrow.

Narayana Pillai: Wait, I have reasons to ask you to go to the second show. (whispering) A lot of love scenes in it. I have seen it. You must see it tonight.

Kantha: All right. I'll go now!

Narayana Pillai: Good! Go, go! Karuppa, you idiot! You go along with her.

Karuppan: So you want me to go?

Narayana Pillai: You idiot, go!

(both of them leave)

My God! Got rid of them at last! O God! Why don't you help me win over Kalyani! Please! You help all and sundry. Consider my case, won't you?

(calls) Kalyani, Kalyani!

Kalyani: (coming out from her room)

Did you call me, sir?

Narayana Pillai: Kantha has gone to a film. Get me my spectacles, will you? Gone to the second show. She'll be back only at twelve. I have to call you for everything. Can you read, Kalyani?

Kalyani: Yes, sir. I can.

Narayana Pillai: Good, good! Then you can read all these books.

Kalyani: Very well, sir.

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Narayana Pillai: Look at this – 'A widow's love'

Kalyani: (shocked) Sir!

Narayana Pillai: That's a book written by Bharathidasan. It's about – widows. He says widows can fall in love. Look at these lines.

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Kalyani: (trying to get away from him) I feel sleepy, sir.

Let me go

Narayana Pillai: But I cannot sleep now, Kalyani! Do you want – 'An unexpected kiss'?

Kalyani: (shocked again) What?

Narayana Pillai: That is also a book. So many books like this one. I am terribly tired of travelling by car and train. Kalyani, can you massage my body?

(Kalyani is in tears)

O no, Kalyani! I don't want it, if you don't like it. Give me that pillow, will you?

(Kalyani brings the pillow. Narayana Pillai, while looking at it, grabs her hands)

Kalyani: Sir, please! It's unbecoming of a respectable person like you!

Narayana Pillai: That is why I do like this!

You should be proud of being an object of love to me!

Kalyani: If I had wanted such things, I would not have been a servant maid. I would have lived like a rich lady.

Narayana Pillai: It's not too late even now! Give me a sign with your lovely eyes, I'll be a slave at your feet for ever!

Kalyani: Shut up! You lusty animal! (pushes him away)

Narayana Pillai: You eat the food I give, but you don't heed to my wishes?

Kalyani: The food you give me is for my labour, not for my body. I am your servant.

Narayana Pillai: On the other side of respectable people like me, there's no difference between master and slave.

(going closer to her)

Kalyani: If you touch me again, you'll see only my dead body!

Narayana Pillai: Go ahead, die! I'll touch your dead body till it reaches the burial ground. You are my love, my queen!

(tries to embrace her)

Kalyani: Help! Somebody help!

(Kantha enters. Narayana Pillai is shocked to see her.)

Kantha: Fine, fine, excellent indeed! A respectable man doing like this? You sent me to see *Krishnaleela*, so that you can perform Narayana leela here! That too with a servant maid! The whole town has been making fun of you!

Narayana Pillai: You had been to the night show. Why the hell did you come back?

Karuppan: Madam left in the middle of the show.

Kantha: I know my man, don't I? The womenfolk in the neighbourhood are afraid to come out when you are around.

Narayana Pillai: Why should they come here?

Kantha: Never mind. If someone tries to molest your sister, would you keep quiet?

Narayana Pillai: I'll do what I want to do. You are not to question my deeds.

Kantha: Then I'll run away with another man. What will you do?

Narayana Pillai: Do that if you want, who cares?

Karuppan: Boss, what is it you're saying?

Narayana Pillai: (To Kantha) Will you have the guts to do it?

Kantha: You shameless man! Kalyani, go to your room and bolt it from inside. Don't let any dog enter your room!

(Kalyani, with her child, leaves the house)

Scene 29

Kalyani walks along a street, singing a sad song bemoaning the plight of poor, helpless women.

Scene 30

Narayana Pillai and Karuppan are returning from a temple. Karuppan is walking behind Pillai, carrying a silver plate containing the '*prasadam*' – broken coconuts, plantain, flowers etc.

A beggar follows them.

Beggar: Please, sir, give me the coconut. Half the coconut will do. Sir, please!

(Karuppan gives him half the coconut)

Narayana Pillai: (watching it) You idiot! Why did you give him that?

Karuppan: Didn't they tell us at the discourse in the temple that charity would save our head?

Narayana Pillai: Did they say that to you and me? It costs money. (to the beggar) Here, give that back!

Beggar: I'm a poor beggar, sir!

Narayana Pillai: Beggar? (beats him) You dirty dog! You want *prasadam*, eh?

(Gunasekaran comes there)

Who the hell are you?

Gunasekaran: You? I've seen you before.

Narayana Pillai: Maybe, you have.

Gunasekaran: You are... you are...

Narayana Pillai: General Merchant Narayana Pillai!

Gunasekaran: I am...Chairman's...

Narayana Pillai: Servant?

Gunasekaran: Yes! The chairman...

Narayana Pillai: Wants to see me?

Gunasekaran: Yes, yes. He wants to see you about...

Narayana Pillai: Sugar, is that it? He needs bags and bags of sugar. Come to my house this evening. I'll give you sugar.

Gunasekaran: You mean, black market?

Narayana Pillai: Shooo! Don't say anything here.

Gunasekaran: All right. Shall I come this evening for black sugar?

Narayana Pillai: Come, come!

(Gunasekaran, madman that he appears to be, beats up Narayana Pillai. The unexpected attack unsettles him.)

Narayana Pillai: (wilting under the blows)

Hey, hey, what's this? Stop it.

Gunasekaran: This is my straight punch! You dirty dog! You want your coconut back? You want *prasadam*, eh?

Narayana Pillai: (tottering) *Paraasakthi*! The frightened fellows who run for their dear life are now bold enough to batter us!

Gunasekaran: The poor who run away
Have turned twisters who sway;
Those who run and those who chase
Are now equal in the race!
(hitting him in the stomach)
So you supply sugar in black?
Now get this once in black
(hits him and floors him).

Scene 31

Gunasekaran stands near the river, washes his hands and face, and drinks the water with cupped hands.

Gunasekaran: (Thinking of his sister)

Kalyani! Somehow I get my food by stealing, cheating or threatening people. How will you and your child appease your hunger? What agony, what struggle you undergo?

(Vimala, who has alighted from a boat nearby, catches Gunasekaran by his collar)

Gunasekaran: (struggling) No, no, I'm not a thief, I'm not a thief!

Vimala: I know you are not a thief. I never thought you are a thief. Your hunger tempted you to steal. You took the food in my bag. You could have asked me. I would have given it to you myself. You could have walked and not run away!

Gunasekaran: I thought you are just like all the others.

Vimala: O, is that why you asked the crows not to trust the humans?

Gunasekaran: Yes. It's wrong to call pitiless people perfect human beings!

Vimala: You are a puzzle, an enigma! Who are you?

Gunasekaran: Am I the District Collector to identify myself in a couple of words? Mine is a long story!

Vimala: I like to hear stories! Won't you tell me yours?

Gunasekaran: I'm sure you won't relish even a tiny bit of my story!

Vimala: You kindle my curiosity. I must hear your story. Come, I'll take you to my house.

Gunasekaran: To your house? Me?
Vimala: (smiling) Don't be afraid. Come with me.

Scene 32

A street

In front of a big house

Kalyani, with her starving child, comes and stands at the gate of the house.

Inside, a man is feeding his dog with biscuits.

The man: (To his dog) Come on, Darling! Come on!

Kalyani: Sir, we are hungry and starving. I must get some milk for my baby. Please sir, give me half anna.

The man: Get away, go!

Kalyani: Please, sir. Let me have one of the dog biscuits.

The man: (angry) What did you say? Calling him a dog?

He's my darling! Go away, get lost!

Scene 33

Vimala's house

Gunasekaran is narrating his story.

Gunasekaran: Mine is the story of a man who desired to dive for pearls, but was destined to gather oysters! I dreamed that my sister's home would be filled with joy and happiness. But it turned out to be the playground of pain! Bandied between hunger and poverty, I finally managed to see my sister. How could I reveal to her my real identity? She had already taken me for a madman. I didn't want to give her more pain by revealing to her who I am. Enough of her crying, no more tears for her,I thought. But she had gone far, far away, and I am still searching for her in vain!

Vimala: Now that I know your story, I don't know whether to laugh or cry!

Gunasekaran: But why?

Vimala: You have more affection but less wisdom in you. Don't be angry with me for saying so. When you had been robbed of your possessions, you should have gone to the police.

Gunasekaran: I was with a young woman; I drank liquor; I lost my money and belongings. I was too ashamed of myself to go to the police!

Vimala: You were not ashamed to be a beggar. You were not ashamed to be a thief. But you were ashamed of expressing your disappointments. What a strange man you are!

Gunasekaran: You don't know. This shameful society is the beggars' banquet hall, lunatic asylum, robbers' den! Why should I be ashamed of myself?

Vimala: Yes! Society is a beggars' banquet hall. But you are a beggar without a begging bowl. Society is a lunatic asylum. But you are a madman who does not pelt stones. Society is a robbers' den, and you are a robber without your tools. You have the guts to criticize the society. But think for a while. You have become a fool in this foolish society!

Gunasekaran: (protesting) Me? A fool?

Vimala: Yes. I'll repeat it a thousand times! There are many rich men in beggar's garb; many millionaires in madman's attire. Celebrations in temples, festivals in churches - and behind these sensitive screens how many thieves thrive! You turned into a thief, lived like a lunatic, and bemoaned a beggar's life! Did you enjoy this life of luxury?

Gunasekaran: What I want is not a life of luxury, only my sister Kalyani.

Vimala: Still I'll point my accusing finger at you! You are utterly selfish. You have always thought of your sister and her wellbeing. Have you ever considered the plight of thousands of sisters in this country? While you roam about the streets searching for your sister, haven't you seen women with their eyes filled with tears, and their stomachs burning with hunger, hanging around the roadside? Who are they? Not one, but millions of Kalyanis are walking like living dead, helplessly, hopelessly, burnt by their hunger, and drowned in their own tears! Has your tongue ever quivered for them? Has your heart ever palpitated for them?

Gunasekaran: Why should my heart palpitate for them? This shameful society, this ungrateful country, these heartless manimals that tread on the downtrodden – they should feel for them. Why should I?

Vimala: Don't forget. You are a part of this society!

Gunasekaran: But very poor!

Vimala: You were driven to that position. Now listen, the young woman who cheated and robbed you, I appreciate her!

Gunasekaran: (shocked) You... appreciate her?

Vimala: Yes. She is the one who opened your eyes. If you had not been reduced to poverty, you would not have thought of the world of the poor. You would never have imagined such a world ever existed! You would be living in a world of joy and comforts. You would be enjoying the breeze in your balcony, and not encountered the tempest in your thatched hut! You despise the evils of the society. You try to extinguish a violent volcano by throwing water over it! You try to pacify a python by playing on a pipe! Social revolution does not mean cutting the branches of a poisonous tree, but pulling out the very roots. You cannot change the society by changing your robes. You should have thought and fought for

thousands of sisters and not for one sister. You should be ashamed of yourself and feel sorry for your selfishness!

Gunasekaran: Enough, enough!

Vimala: Pardon me, I have wounded your feelings. No use cursing the dusty desert. You should think of the ways and means to transform the dreary desert into a blooming garden.

Gunasekaran: You turn the practical pages of the book of the world!

Who is your master?

Vimala: Anna, my brother!

Gunasekaran: Anna?

Vimala: Yes. Did I tell you about my brother? Ours is a funny family. Our father never took things seriously. But my brother used to look at everything intellectually. I am his sister.

(That night, Gunasekaran lying in bed, unable to sleep. He thinks of Kalyani)

Gunasekaran: Kalyani is wandering, I know not where! Here I am, lying on a cot! Nero playing on the fiddle while Rome was in flames! Kalyani, Kalyani!

(He leaves Vimala's house

At the same time, Vimala is dreaming in her sleep. She dreams of Gunasekaran. She sings about him and the way he has touched her heart.

The dream ends, and she wakes up.)

Vimala: Guna! You have left because you think I am an idealist!. Yes, I am. But I am not an idealist who hates love like Manimekalai, but one who loves life like Kannagi!

Scene 34

A Refugee camp

A long queue outside a tent. Refugees from Rangoon are waiting for registration. Inside the tent, an officer is recording their details.

Officer: Father's name?

First Refugee: Paramasivam Pillai.

Officer: Your name?

First Refugee: Ramachandran.

Officer: Ramachandran Pillai?

First Refugee: I have no suffix like that, sir.

Officer: But that's the name of your caste?

First Refugee: Not for me!

Officer: (grimly) Father's profession?

First Refugee: Profession – father, sir!

(The officer gestures him to go out. Another refugee comes in)

Officer: Name?

Second Ref.: Swaran Lal

Officer: How did you come here? We have room for only a hundred people.

Second Ref.: We are from Delhi, sir. Please, have a heart!

Officer: When will you ever reach Delhi?

(Gnanasekaran, wounded badly in bombarment, has lost one of his legs. He walks with a crutch)

Gnanasekaran: (To the officer) Sir!

Officer: That's it. No more place for anyone in the camp.

Go away.

Gnanasekaran: Sir, we are a big group...

Officer: (firmly)No place even for one. Come on, go away.

Don't be a nuisance!

Gnanasekaran: Where shall we go, then?

Officer: Am I here to guide you to places? Go and hang yourselves!

Gnanasekaran: Look, sir. We are wounded; we have lost our limbs. We have been starving for months now. We have no place to sleep in. We walked all the way from Burma! We came here with the fond hope that our Bharath Matha would feed us. If we had braved the bombardment, thousands of us would have been shot dead. We are not here to die desperately, but to live in peace!

Officer: (furious) Shut up! What do you think this is?

An office or your home?

Gnanasekaran: (Philosophically) No place? No place for genuine refugees? This is the land of my birth. The land that throws its doors open to everyone who comes here for shelter or survival! But as long as there are people like you, there won't be any place for human beings here. No place for love and charity!

Officer: (losing his temper) Get out! Get out!

Gnanasekaran: A slaughter house called Shanthi Home! They call this a refugee campl! Come, friends, let's go!

A Refugee: Prison is far better than this shameful shelter!

Gnanasekaran: Be patient, brother! Any hasty action will only land us in prison. The world is not kindly to beggars! Our brothers and sisters are spread all over this country. Our mission should be to gather all of them under one banner. Neither the government nor the political parties are willing to work for our betterment. No use moving from house to house; let us draw the attention of the entire country. Let us not chant "Hara hara, Mahadeva" to be heard in Heaven. Our prayer should reach the precints of the government, rather than the portals of Heaven. We must gather all the beggars of the land and organize a conference. It should be called 'Conference of Beggars of Madras State'

(They laugh)

Why do you laugh? Think instead! We must demand the right to vote. We can contest elections. No one would dare to oppose us! We must conduct this conference somehow. Let us pass revolutionary resolutions that will spark the fire which would rock the government. Be prepared to sacrifice our very lives so that our society will live with dignity.

(They all shout 'we want conference!

We want conference!')

All right, then. Let me go and collect donations for our conference.

Scene 35

A refugee camp.

Kalyani is frantically searching for her three brothers.

Kalyani: Sir, refugees from Rangoon are here, they say.

Officer: That's right. Whom do you want?

Kalyani: Chandrasekaran, Gnanasekaran, Gunasekaran.

Officer: (checking the list) No refugees with the names you mentioned in this camp. You see a group of people under the banyan tree over there? Better go and ask them.

(Kalyani goes to the group of people)

Kalyani: You are from Burma?

A Refugee: Yes, we came here as refugees but now we are beggars!

Kalyani: Do you know my brothers who were in Rangoon?

Refugee: I don't think so. What names?

Kalyani: Chandrasekaran, Gnanasekaran, Gunasekaran.

Refugee: All of us are here. Go and see if you can find them.

(Kalyani searches in vain)

Scene 36

Kalyani begging for food at a house.

Kalyani: Sir, we haven't eaten for six days.

The man: We haven't eaten for three days. You go from house to house begging. We can't do that, so we stay inside. That's the difference! Wait, there's a feast at Judge Sekar's house. Go there, you'll get food.

Kalyani: Which house, sir?

The man: There, the house at the corner.

(Kalyani goes towards the house)

Scene 37

Gnanasekaran returns to his friends after collecting donations.

Gnanasekaran: Raghavan, any news?

Raghavan: A poor beggar woman came with her little child. We told her we are refugees from Rangoon. She said she was looking for her three brothers. We couldn't help her.

Gnanasekaran: Did she tell you their names?

A Refugee: Didn't sound like Tamil names.

Raghavan: (recalling the names) something like Chandrasekaran.... (excited) Chandrasekaran, Gnanasekaran, Gunasekaran?

All: Yes, yes!

Gnanasekaran: Kalyani! My sister Kalyani!

(starts crying, loses his balance and stumbles down)

Scene 38

In front of Judge Sekar's house.

Chandrasekaran, now Judge Sekar, is about to get into his car.

Kalyani: Sir, sir, we are starving!

Judge: Come later, not now.

Kalyani: God bless you, sir, please!

Judge: Won't you listen?

(Kalyani clutches his feet)

Judge: Pity and compassion couldn't help me see my sister!

(Kicks her down, Kalyani falls on the road, clutching her baby)

Kalyani: You heartless beasts! Haven't you got brothers and sisters? Are you blind to the sufferings of a destitute woman and her crying child? You generous gentleman who talk about compassion, heaven and hell, if there is a hell, it will hold every one of you!

(The watchman comes and chases her away)

O my child! This is a world for luxury and brutality. We have no place in this cruel world. What are you looking at? You wish all my teardrops were drops of milk, don't you? If only your father had seen the gentleman kicking us down! My brothers should have seen it! But then, you have taken away your father even as you were in my womb. Why are you crying? You're hungry. How can you bear the pangs of hunger when I myself cannot bear it?

(walks away)

Scene 39

Frustrated by his fruitless search for Kalyani,

Gunasekaran breaks into a song, near Paraasakthi temple.

Kuppan comes and talks to Gunasekaran.

Kuppan: Brother! Whatever you said in your song is correct!

Gunasekaran: It's not my song, Kuppa. If it were my song, people would thrash me! It's a song written by somebody else.

(The priest of the temple, with a rough face and thick moustache, comes)

Priest: Kuppa! It's time for the *pooja*. Go and ring the bell.

(Gunasekaran is leaving)

Kuppan: Brother! Will you come tomorrow?

(The priest performs *pooja*. Kuppan is sitting outside, near the bell.

Kalyani comes there.)

Kalyani: (To the goddess *Paraasakthi*)

Paraasakthi! You are my only refuge.

Mother of the world! Help me!

Priest: Who's there?

Kalyani: A helpless wretch, I am Kalyani.

Priest: Don't worry. You have come to the abode of *Paraasakthi*. All your troubles will be over!

You are like my daughter. Go inside and worship my Mother!

(Kalyani goes inside)

Hah! What a beautiful body! How youthful! I must not leave her alone. What, molest her here in the temple? Where else? What's wrong if I commit this outrage on her? Afraid of Paraasakthi? Why, she won't budge, being a statue. Let me not waste the time!

(The priest goes inside and grabs the hands of Kalyani)

Kalyani, don't mistake me. A doctor has every right to touch the patient. We, as priests, have every right to touch devotees like you!

Kalyani: Stop it, you dirty beast! Mother! *Paraasakthi*!

(The priest tries to overpower her. Kuppan, who witnesses this heinous scene, runs out and keeps ringing the bell. The priest, alarmed, lets Kalyani go. She takes her child and runs away, crying)

Scene 40

Kalyani, driven by hunger and lusty, lewd men, contemplates suicide. She stands on a bridge. A river runs below.

Kalyani: (Looking at her starving child)

My dear! There is the path to our world! A world where there is no hunger! Why do you want to take away my life, in the name of the new world! Is that what you want to ask! No – I have spared my life all these days for the sake of your life. But now, I am going to take away that life. How can I leave you in this harsh world? My precious ruby you are! I am going to throw you into the river down below. Let it carry you to your destiny. Those evil people, who wouldn't offer food to the hungry ones, have paved the way for the river here. Come, my child, let us go to the world where there is no hunger, no poverty. Kiss me my precious one, won't you? One last kiss on your mother's withered lips!

(Kisses the child profusely with a hardened heart, throws the child into the river below)

Police whistle is heard; Kalyani runs away, a policeman pursuing her. She jumps into the river. She is rescued by the police.

Scene 41

A court hall

Kalyani on the stand for the accused

The trial is in progress

Judge: (To Kalyani) What do you say about this murder?

(Kalyani gives no answer)

Your silence would amount to contempt of the court. You are charged with murder and attempted suicide. Standing like a dumb person won't help you. Answer the question. Who are you? What is your name? Which is your native place? Why did you want to kill your own child? Who is the child's father? Answer me. Does it mean the child doesn't know the name of its father?

Kalyani: Yes! How can a baby know the name of its father?

Your Honour, don't ask me anything. Give your judgement, please!

Judge: How can I deliver the judgement without conducting an enquiry? What have you got to say about the charges against you?

Kalyani: What can I say? Do what the law says!

Judge: You are a murderer then?

Kalyani: Yes, as per your law; not as per justice.

Judge: You have murdered your own flesh and blood and you call it justice?

Kalyani: I gave life to my child. I have taken it away. If I have the right to create life, I have the right to destroy the very life I created.

Judge: All created things are the property of the Government.

Kalyani: Property of the government? We were withering without food; wandering in search of shelter; we were treated like stray dogs; hunger made us howl, writhe like worms. The government did not bother to help us! We hated life itself amidst this great injustice. We longed for death so that we could go to the other world in peace! But the law tarried us and tied our hands saying we belonged to the government. What wonderful government! What excellent justice!

Judge: Don't argue. You have committed murder, which is a crime. Do you admit it or not?

Kalyani: A crime? If this is a crime, what about Nalla Thangal who threw all her seven children into the well when she was disowned and deserted by the society? Isn't it a greater crime? The story of Nalla Thangal is enacted on the stage everywhere in Tamilnadu. Why doesn't your law prevent it or prohibit it? There is the story of a staunch devotee who killed this own son and served the meal to a sanyasi. Why didn't your law ban such stories of human sacrifice? I have merely followed their example. How can it be a crime?

Judge: Don't talk about Nalla Thangal and Siruthondar. It's not relevant here. Your anger and dejection should not deface and degrade the institution of justice. Tell us about the incidents that had taken place, and don't blame the government or the society for your present position.

Kalyani: My little son was crying for mother's milk. I am not ashamed of saying this in the presence of so many brothers in this court. I could not give suckle to my baby with my emaciated breasts. The baby was starving to death. I could not bear the agony of seeing my child sinking slowly. So I threw the child into the river and killed it. Is it a crime?

Judge: You should have done everything possible to save your child.

Kalyani: My child is not Thirugnana Sambandhar for Parvathi Devi to come down and feed him with mother's milk. It was my task to appease his hunger. My youth was my enemy. Malicious men tried to molest me. Somehow I escaped from their clutches and now I find myself in the clutches of law as an accused criminal. Had I wished, I would have chosen a life of comfort and luxury. I would have lived, not as a widow, but as a prostitute. That is what the society wants. That is how I can silence the society which rendered me an orphan.

Judge: Are you an orphan?

Kalyani: Yes. Orphaned by time and circumstances.

Judge: Cut out your story and come out with the facts!

Kalyani: A day after I was born, my mother died. I was brought up by my father. I had three elder brothers whom I had never seen. They had left for Rangoon

when they were very young. I got married. But my husband died in an accident. My father also died of heart attack. I was hoping against hope to see my brothers Chandrasekaran, Gnanasekaran and Gunasekaran. They never came. I wandered as a beggar to sustain myself and my child. No one gave me any job. Everyone turned me out. There was a judge, an upright judge they said; when I begged for food, he kicked me with his boots.

(Judge Sekar, now realizing Kalyani is his long lost sister, drops from his chair and swoons.)

Scene 42

A road side platform.

A public meeting in progress

A speaker is addressing the audience. Gunasekaran is listening to the speech, standing amidst the crowd.

Speaker: History tells us that the great queen Cleopatra, the paragon of beauty, used to drink her wine with the pearls of Tamilnadu immersed in it. The women of Tamilnadu, on the other hand, anxiously await the money sent to them by their husbands who sweat it out in Rangoon and Singapore. The gods in the temples of Tamilnadu are adorned with diamond-studded crowns, thrones made of rubies, golden shields to cover their bodies. But God's children are suffering and struggling for food. We have heard about mothers who sell their children because they are too poor to raise them up. Imagine the mother, carrying the baby in her womb, giving birth to her darling, suckling the little angel, singing lullabies to the little one in the cradle, feeding the growing child with rice balls soaked in milk, dressing up the tiny tot for school, dreaming of her young man getting married! The very same mother, driven by the pangs of poverty, sells her child crying 'baby for sale!' as they do in auction halls, for a paltry eight annas. A grown-up child is sold for three rupees! How tragic! How terrifying!

Let me tell you the latest case. A young mother, unable to feed her child, and driven by hunger, threw the child into a river and then jumped into the river to kill herself. She was rescued in time and produced before the court. She now awaits death penalty. Her name is Kalyani.

(Gunasekaran is shocked by the news and leaves in a hurry. On his way, Kuppan stops him and narrates what happened in the temple. Gunasekaran is furious. He rushes to the Paraasakthi temple, to punish the priest.)

Scene 43

Paraasakthi temple

The temple is filled with men and women devotees.

Pooja is being performed by the priest.

Outside the sanctum sanctorum, many *kavadis* are seen. A young man is brought in a stretcher-like *kavadi* and placed before the temple. The priest comes there and performs a *pooja*. He then applies sacred ash to the young man who sits up. The young man's mother stands beside him.

Mother: O *Matha*! *Paraasakthi*! I have given all my offerings to you! Save my son!

Priest: *Ohm....... Kriemm.........hriemm*! What's the problem with your son?

Mother: *Paraasakthi* was residing in his body. I promised that if my son is cured completely, I will carry the *kavadi* for my son. By the grace of *Paraasakthi*, my son lost one of his eyes, but is alive!

Priest: Have no fear! Your son will live long!

(suddenly a voice is heard, coming from behind the statue of *Paraasakthi*.)

Voice: You priest! Study your horoscope first!

Priest: (awestruck) Is it *Ambal* speaking?

Voice: When did you hear *Ambal* speak? You fool!

Priest: (excited) *Paraasakthi*!

(Gunasekaran emerges from behind the statue, laughing cynically.)

Gunasekaran: *Paraasakthi* is your mother. My sister Kalyani is your paramour, is that so?

Priest: Who are you? What misdeed is this?

Gunasekaran: When you played mischief with my sister, you never thought of this as a misdeed! You are blessing the devotees, you wicked villain! Now you stand exposed in the presence of these people. They are the judges.

Let them decide and decree!

Priest: (frightened) *Paraasakthi*! *Paraasakthi*!

Gunasekaran: Your *Paraasakthi* is nothing but a stone! If she had spoken, she would have stopped you with her stern, admonishing voice. Crying and trying to cut loose from your cursed clutches, my sister pleaded with your *Paraasakthi* a thousand times. Did she come to her rescue?

Priest: (trying to save himself) Devotees, do something!

Gunasekaran: You beg for human help, you devotee of the Devi?

She is sporting a spear in one hand, a swirling sword in the other. What makes you fear death?

Priest: Blasphemy! Blasphemy!

Gunasekaran: Blasphemy! Is it not blasphemy to transform the place of sanctity into a bedroom for seduction? Is it not blasphemy to transform the temple into a fortress of lust? You blasted priest! I am not afraid of death. I know what punishment awaits me, once I have done with the deed I have in mind - the hangman's noose, the gallows! Hang it, I don't care! In this sinful society, false priests like you should be exposed and executed so that these ignorant people would learn a lesson!

Priest: Why do you come and disturb the festival?

(He raises the sickle in his hand)

Gunasekaran: (Snatching the sickle from the priest, he shouts with rage)

Festival! You tried to destroy my sister's life! This is the festival for you and your *Paraasakthi*! Festival for this sickle! Festival for blood! For courage, for glory!

(He lands the sickle on the priest's head)

Scene 44

Judge Sekar's (Chandrasekaran)home

He is mentally disturbed and in a semi-conscious state.

He mutters feebly.

Sekar: Kalyani! Kalyani! My sister... she is very poor. She has no decent saree to wear; just a worn-out, patched one. She has no diamond necklace; just a yellow thread around her neck. No, not even that! O God, she is a widow!

Saraswathy: (looking at the doctor with great anxiety)

Doctor?

Doctor: Don't worry! He is mentally disturbed a bit. We'll give some medicines to cure his depression. He is going to be all right!

Sekar: Medicines? No medicines for me! Doctor, is there any medicine for the poor to keep away hunger? Won't you give that medicine? Won't you? If you don't give it, they would throw their children into the river! They will, doctor! My Kalyani has done that. Kalyani, Kalyani!

Scene 45

A court room

Gunasekaran on the stand for the accused

Gunasekaran: This court has entertained many strange cases, witnessed many strange people. But there is nothing strange about this case nor am I a strange personality! I am nothing more than a normal person treading the path of life. I caused confusion and consternation in the temple. I assaulated the priest. These are the charges brought against me, and you presume I am going to deny these charges! No, certainly not! I caused confusion and consternation in the temple, not because I am against the existence of temples, but because I strongly feel that a temple should not be a refuge for scoundrels and criminals! I assaulted the priest, not because he is a devotee, but because devotion should not become a show of hypocrisy!

(a lawyer rises to object)

Of all the people on earth, why should I alone bother about these, you may ask! I was directly affected by these atrocities. I am selfish, you may assert! My selfishness is mingled with social concern! I am like the fish that cleans up the pond eating the fungus and dirt. I wish you had seen the many wild jungle streams he has crossed. No nightingales singing over the branches, but only snakes wriggling across the perilous paths. I haven't felt the bliss of breeze but I have polevaulted many a pit of fire! Please, Your Honour, listen to my story before you pronounce your judgement.

I was born in this lovely land of Tamilnadu. Born in one country and driven to another country for livelihood, that's the fate of the people of Tamilnadu! I am no exception to this rule. Rangoon! It gave me a precious life and pride of position. I came back to this country to see my sister in her wedding dress. That pernicious woman standing there as an accused in a cheating case, I was one of the victims of her tempting treachery. I lost all my money and belongings, I was reduced to a beggar, dragging myself desperately to find food for my hungry stomach. I feigned madness and managed to get both money and food! And then I saw my sister - as a widow! Kalyani—a blissful name! But her neck was bare! With her baby in her arms, tears in her eyes, she wandered in search of food, in search of her brothers. I was searching for her. Many men offered to help my poor sister. A few craved for her body. Your Honour, that man over there, Venu, is accused of murder. That wicked criminal tried to molest my sister. Had I not saved her in time, she would have killed herself. Men who posed as devotees demanded her flesh. That priest over there tried to violate her honour in the name of *Paraasakthi*. My sister was driven to commit suicide by this priest. She contemplated self-slaughter. She didn't want to leave her little one as an orphan, to die of hunger on the street. So she killed her own child.

It is not a strange thing to murder one's beloved, if there was need to do so. Mahatma Gandhi, who championed the cause of *ahimsa*, who showed compassion for all animals, once asked his men to kill a wounded calf unable to bear its sufferings. Kalyani has done the same thing. How can it be a crime? A son of the soil who returns from a foreign soil has no means to live here. A daughter of the soil finds no security here. If only she had yielded to temptations, she would have lived in the mansions of millionaires, comfortably, luxuriously! Does this court want only such things? Frightened by luxury, my sister ran away. Chased by money, my sister ran away. Threatened by devotion, she ran to the edge of her dear life! Those who swear by the law today, should have stopped her and offered her a decent life. Did they ever do it? Did they ever let her live?

A Lawyer: The accused has turned a defense counsel for someone else's case!

Gunasekaran: Not someone else's case! It is also my case–my sister's case. What's wrong if a brother tries to teach a lesson to the villain who violated her honour? Kalyani tried to commit suicide. It's a crime. She killed her own child. It's a crime. I assaulted the priest. It's a crime. Who is responsible for all these crimes? Who is responsible for Kalyani's pathetic plight? Whose crime is it? Fate? Or is it the crime of those who lure poor women with money? Whose crime is it that false priets in the name of God plunge into rituals of lust and sex? God? Or is it the crime of man? If such crimes are not weeded out, more and more Gunasekarans and Kalyanis

will appear. This is the lesson, logic, political philosophy you will find on the pages of our life history!

Judge: Nobody should take law into his own hands. Your arguments should not be directed to demean the government or the law. Just tell the court what had happened and answer the questions put to you. Is Kalyani really your sister?

Gunasekaran: Are you not amused by that question, Your Honour?

Judge: All right. Summon Kalyani to the stand.

(Kalyani takes the stand)

Is this man your brother?

Kalyani: No, I used to call him mad brother. He is not my own brother!

Gunasekaran: Kalyani, I am Gunasekaran, your brother!

Judge: Yes?

Kalyani: He is a bit mad!

Gunasekaran: (heartbroken) Yes, I am mad! I feigned madness. I did not want to disturb her by revealing to her who I am. Your Honour, please believe me! Slap on me whatever punishment you want to give. But spare my sister!

Judge: Don't talk about that. She is accused of murdering her own child.

(Vimala enters into the Court hall with Kalyani's child)

Vimala: No, no Your Honour! Kalyani has not killed the child.

Here is her child!

Gunasekaran: (surprised) Vimala!

Vimala: Guna!

Judge: How did you come by the child?

Vimala: On the night of the full moon, I usually take to boating on the river. On such a night, this child fell into my boat from the bridge. As I couldn't find anyone, I decided to keep the child with me. My brother returned from his business tour.

(Flashback)

Vimala: Brother, look!

Brother: Whose child is this?

Vimala: I was boating last night as usual. This child fell into the boat. I don't know whose child it is. So I am keeping it.

Brother: Maybe, it is Kalyani's child.

Vimala: Who is it?

Brother: (reads from a newspaper)

"Police have arrested a woman named Kalyani for murdering her own child due to poverty and attempting to commit suicide."

(Flashback ends)

Vimala: Now that I know this is Kalyani's child, I came here.

Judge: Do you know these two?

Vimala: Yes, I know. He is Gunasekaran, and that is his sister - Kalyani.

Kalyani: (overcome by emotion) Brother!

Gunasekaran: Kalyani!

Judge: (moved by the emotional re-union)

This is a strange case, indeed!

(The Judge takes a lenient view of Gunasekaran's deeds and acquits him with a warning.

Kalyani is also acquitted likewise as her child is found to be alive.

Kalyani, Vimala and Gunasekaran go to see Chandrasekaran.)

Scene 46

In front of a house

Gnanasekaran: Sir, we are going to organize a Beggar's Conference. Help us with your donations, please!

The man: Why man? Don't you have any work to do?

Gnanasekaran: No, sir! That's why we are organizing the conference!

The man: If we donate to your cause, we'll have to join your tribe!

Scene 47

Judge Sekar's house

Chandrasekaran is still in a dazed condition. His mind is obsessed with his sister Kalyani.

Chandrasekaran: Kalyani! Kalyani!

Kalyani: Brother, I'm here! Look at me!

Gunasekaran: What's wrong with him, *Anni*?

Saraswathy: (To Chandrasekaran) Here they are – Gunasekaran and your sister Kalyani!

Chandrasekaran: No, her own brother kicked her with his boots. No, no, she has jumped into the river! Her own brother sentenced her to hanging!

Gunasekaran: (anxiously) Brother!

Chandrasekaran: I wrote the judgement with this hand! Brother or sister – crime is a crime!

Saraswathy: (showing the child to him) Look here! Kalyani's baby!

(Slowly he regains his consciousness with tears in his eyes, he embraces Kalyani and her child)

A voice is heard from outside the door, someone calling "Sir, sir!"

Saraswathy: Who is it?

Vimala: Let me go and see

(Gnanasekaran is standing outside.)

Gnanasekaran: We are going to organize a Beggar's Conference. I've come to collect donations. (Vimala laughs)

Why do you laugh, Madam? You may think it's amusing! But that day is not far off when a beggar would become an honourable minister!

(The old servant who comes there, recognizes his master Gnanasekaran. All the brothers and their sister are at last united. There's joy in everybody's face.)

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After sometime

Vimala and Gunasekaran in the front yard.

Vimala: It's time for me to go!

Gunasekaran: So soon?

Vimala: They'll be expecting me at home.

Gunasekaran: When can I see you again?

Vimala: No way! Never!

Gunasekaran: Why?

Vimala: Because ... it's just like that!

Gunasekaran: OK. Go then!

(Vimala goes. After taking a few steps, she is stopped by something. She turns and finds that Gunasekaran has tied a long thread to the end of her saree and is holding one end!

Gunasekaran hums the song Vimala sang once)

Saraswathy: Gunasekaran, you don't need a thread so long! Just a small one will do, to tie around her neck!

Gunasekaran: Even that is not needed these days. Two garlands, one speaker - there ends the matter!

(Kalyani with her child comes)

Kalyani: That's not the end of the matter, brother!

Gunasekaran: O you! Can I have some idlies, please!

Why do you laugh? You think I'm mad?

"*Manthriji*, do we get rains regularly?

Three spells in a month?"

(They all laugh)

Gnanasekaran: All right! Give me leave to go!

Chandrasekaran: Where do you want to go!

Gnanasekaran: We belong to two different worlds!

You are at home in your bungalow and I must retire to the beggars' colony which is my home! I'll be really at home there!

Kalyani: Then I shall also join you, brother.

Gunasekaran: Why leave me out? I'll also accompany you!

Vimala: Why not invite all the poor beggars to our home?

Chandrasekaran: That's a good idea! Gnanasekaran, it's your wish to convert all beggars into reasonably rich people!

Call all your friends in!

Gnanasekaran: (delighted) Thanks! Let me go and bring my brothers with bowls!

Scene 48

"Santha Nayagi Orphanage" - a home for beggars and destitutes - is inaugurated.

All of them break into a song.

END

II
Manokara

Scene 48

Preface

When we look back at the past history of *Manokara* of the 1920s, the original drama, as written by that well-known litterateur and dramaturge, Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar, we are amazed by the perennial popularity of the work. The fact that it was enacted before packed audiences, every night, without a break, for seventy long years, attests to the immensely popular reception that the public accorded to it. If it did happen today, surely this would be a matter for the Guinness Book of Records! The only other parallel that could be cited here was Agatha Christi's *Mouse Trap* which ran to packed houses for many thousand sessions of acting for months!

So *Manokara* was a legend by itself, which had caught and enthralled the Tamil imagination, and that too for a long time, in those days.

Sambanda Mudaliar came under the profound influence of Elizabethan Drama, particularly the Revenge Tragedies, of Shakespeare, Thomas Kyd, Webster and Marston. Skirting around the philosophic introversion of the Elizabethan vision "to be or not to be!," he made *Manokara* a play of plain revengeful action play.

Kalaignar's *Manokara* is a masterful adaptation of the original *Manokara*. But it is done with such adroit departure from the original and in such finesse that it reads like a newly written play – a mosaic of many designs.

First, let us examine the dramatis personae of Kalaignar's *Manokara*:

Manokaran: He is the hero. A soul of honour and chivalry, and a proud warrior who ever holds his head high and never genuflects before enemies. A master swordsman before whom the opponents always lick the dust. He is a loyal son to his father, and is equally, if not more, devoted to his mother, for whom he would do anything. A gentleman lover, with tons of affection for his beloved wife, Vijaya, daughter of an enemy king whom he had defeated. His hesitation to draw the sword and deal a deathly blow at the most crucial times, because of his mother's injunction, is distantly reminiscent of the painful delays of Hamlet!

Purushothaman: He is Manokaran's father, a famed king of the dateless Tamil country. His vaunted martial prowess always puts the fear of God into his enemies. Every inch an imposing regal figure, but with not so venial a flaw, namely, his blind infatuation for that Delilah, Vasanthasena! This almost brings about his ruin and places him in an unenviable position, but his finally begging the pardon of his wife and queen, Padmavathy, redeems him from shame and happily restores him to his old status. His treatment of his son, Manokaran, is so much unlike a father's!

Padmavathy: King Purushothaman's consort and queen, is a paragon of the proverbial Tamil virtues of personal nobility, love and familial affection. She is a wife of monumental patience that countenances her husband's infidelity, just to make him happy in the company of that temptress and adulteress, Vasanthasena. This brings her untold miseries and mortifications. Whatever her inherent flaws, she redeems herself as an archetype of a loving mother and a diehard devotee to truth and personal honour. She is like a surrogate mother to Vijaya, her daughter-in-law, whom she treats with so much kindness and understanding, unlike the proverbial mother-in-law!

Vasanthasena: A thoroughbred villain, her role in the play is interesting and unusual. She is the *femme fatale*, who is guilty of drawing Purushothaman away from his lawful wife, Padmavathy. She has many traits to her character. First, she is a murderess, having killed her husband, Kesarivarman and then an adulteress, carrying on a liaison with Ukrasenan, the king of a neighbouring country. She is driven by a Machiavellian ambition, and what with her artful scheming, she will stop at nothing to achieve her ends. Though she has no compunction whatsoever, she has a lot of gumption and mental resourcefulness, to back her up in any situation. If at all, one trait that may save her from her innate depravity and final damnation, it is her love and affection for her demented son, Vasanthan. If comparisons are not odious, she is the closest cousin to Iago! If Shakespeare would permit a slight change in his dramatic delineation, Vasanthasena can "smile and smile, and yet be a villain!"

Vasanthan: A likeable and innocent character, he is made more poignant, by his mental retardation. Till the very end of the play, he means no harm to anyone, and his innocent, but tactless blabberings seem to set him out as a buffoon in the play, and thus he is an unusual son of Vasanthasena. One wonders whether he has come as a poetic nemesis to Vasanthasena's evil propensities. However, Vasanthan earns our sympathies by his selfless affection to his 'brother', Manokaran, in whose arms he befittingly dies! His innocence deeply touches us. Perhaps it serves as a foil to Vasanthasena's Satanic nature. What a dramatic

apposition! Vasanthansena, the serpent in the garden, and Vasanthan, a vessel of innocence!

Ukrasenan: As a lover, and later as a paramour of Vasanthasena, he is a bird of the same feather, given to slyly entering the king's palace in an ascetic's guise. A lustful and vainglorious man, he comes to his appropriate end, for Manokaran kills him, at the close of the play.

Sathyaseelan, the respected minister and Rajapriyan, a devoted friend of Manokaran, may be looked upon as minor characters who serve to impel the forward movement of the play.

Kesarivarman: The hapless husband of Vasanthasena, is killed by her. He is a convenient dramatic device, as an invisible being and he contributes to the horror element of a revenge play, and brings to end the life of Vasanthasena, as he takes upon himself to do this.

Vijaya: The daughter of a Pandiya king, and wife of Manokaran, is somewhat of a colourless character. She serves to fulfil a ceremonial role, though interestingly, she is the daughter of an enemy king.

As part of the history of *Manokara*, in all its 'designs' a word must be said of the stellar cast chosen to play the roles, for the actors richly complement Kalaignar the playwright, as much as Kalaignar complements the players. Both, by a remarkable coincidence, are dramatically inseparable! Though praising Sivaji Ganesan, who plays the part of Manokaran, may look like carrying coal to Newcastle, he does a perfect job in the role marked for him, and which so eminently suits him. His stentorian voice, his letter-perfect delivery, his body language, his immaculate Tamil pronunciation do full justice, and we wonder whether Kalaignar wrote his lines specially for him!

P. S. Kannamba too rises to the challenging acting and delivers the dialogues with equal ease and finesse. Those long dialogues of Padmavathy are delivered in such a manner that we do not feel their heaviness. Suffice it to say, as a senior professional, she has made her indelible contribution, enriching Kalaignar's characterization.

T. R. Rajakumari, befitting the sinister inner nature of Vasanthasena, speaks a highly clipped language to telling effect. Her dialogues, along with her good looks, add duration and intensity.

We should remember that behind all these, as described above, is the staple dimension of Kalaignar's prose that is scintillating music to the ears of the play-goers. If prose is the "other harmony" of verse, as is often said, the rich cadences of Kalaignar's prose, like a magic wand, keep the audience spellbound. On this one ground alone, the play deserves to be read and re-read and heard, for perennial pleasure!

Kalaignar's *Manokara* is a play in one continuous movement, without any convenient divisions of scenes, according to literary conventions. But there is no dearth of suspense, eager expectation, melodramatic action, passionate love-dialogues, and purple passages of eloquent delivery. For swift action, for unforgettable visualizations, for tear-jerking sentiments, for electrically charged dialogues, the play is unparalleled, as a mosaic of many designs.

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The Story of the Play

Taking leave of his mother Padmavathy, and wife Vijaya, the protagonist Manokaran sets out to invade the Pandiya country, on the auspicious hour chosen by the family priest. Vasanthasena, who holds sway over his father, believes that if she told Padmavathy that Manokaran died in the battlefield, Padmavathy would die, and that she would herself be able to become the queen. Accordingly, she arranges with one Bouddhayanan to do the deed. When Bouddhayanan tells Padmavathy that Manokaran is dead, Manokaran appears there. Bouddhayanan is pardoned. Mother Padmavathy restrains Manokaran who is angered by the plot of Vasanthasena. The king decides to make Manokaran the prince. The royal priest enters the Ceremonial Hall, to find Vasanthasena seated by the king. He is angered. Manokaran too is extremely angry. But, owing to the promise given to his mother, he is mollified. At the Spring Festival, Vasanthasena calls Manokaran a harlot's son. Because of this, the king too is angry with Vasanthasena. On learning about this incident at the Spring Festival, Padmavathy writes to Sathyaseelan, a minister. Changing the letter, Vasanthasena creates confusion in the mind of the king. Suspecting Padmavathy, he orders Sathyaseelan himself to kill Manokaran. Sathyaseelan is distressed. To find out the reason, Manokaran goes to the Royal Hall. The king orders that Manokaran be brought enchained. Because of the arguments that ensue at the Hall, Manokaran attempts to kill his father. Padmavathy leaps forward and prevents him. Manokaran is sentenced to death and is taken to the place of execution to be killed.

The king, contemplating on the good nature of his wife, who stopped the son, and saved his life, changes his mind. Just when Manokaran and Sathyaseélan are about to cut and kill each other, the king hastens in the guise of a spy, shows the royal signet, announces that the king has rescinded his command, and saving them, he makes his departure. Manokaran, Sathyaseelan and friend Rajapriyan are in disguise, without going to the city. Manokaran is also reluctant to return to the city. The king receives proper explanation from Padmavathy, for the false impression the letter has created. Both are happy. As the king comes to know of the plot by which Vasanthasena had changed the letter, and imputed a blot on Padmavathy, she plans to kill the king himself.

The spectre of her dead husband, Kesarivarman, killed by her, who often came to threaten her, appears again to frighten her. That night, Vasanthasena's mad son, Vasanthan, comes there, dressed in regal attire. Taking him for the king, she kills him. In grief that she has killed her own son, Vasanthasena commits suicide. In such a situation, a war becomes inevitable against the Pandiya country. When King Purushothaman is on the point of defeat, Manokaran intervenes *incognito* and brings victory to the Chola country. King Purushothaman comes to know of the true nature of Manokaran. The king's family is united and there is joy all around.

Text of the Play

(Inside of a cave. A formless being is chiselling a statue. Master is standing before it smiling.)

Master: Victory! A reward for not minding suffering! A fitting compensation for many years of struggle! From now on, I shall accomplish whatever is in my mind. Kesarivarma! Let your careworn eyes glow with happiness; clouds of sorrow flee from you. Difficulties hereafter are dust to us. Ha... Ha... Ha... Victory! Victory!

(*Kesarivarman's voice alone is heard. The tiny chisel and the knife continue to do their work*).

Kesarivarman: My great mentor! True, is it? Am I not visible to your eyes?

Master: Yes! Kesarivarma! You have become formless. The medicine I have found has begun to work its ways. What could not be got has been got. My research has witnessed a great triumph. You can see all. But none can see you.

Kesarivarman: My great mentor! For thirteen years... Restless I have been to avenge the wicked one! You have now carved out a path for me. Master! Won't the formlessness last for long?

Master: It won't last. But still one could try. If only the herbs I have been searching for are available, not only can one be formless, but also immortal. But Kesarivarma! Use this for the well being of the good!

Kesarivarman: I shall use this to let good people live! But at the same time, I shall make public the sinister deeds of this evil woman. Vicious and vile.... The termagant who gave poison to her husband! I have not died by your poison. Kesarivarman is still alive! He is not dead! He won't die... without exposing your designs! Treacherous woman!... A woman of wile speech!

Master: Ha... Ha... Ha...

Kesarivarman: Respectful master!

Master: That is only a statue!

Kesarivarman: Only a statue it is! Why did I carve her out! To rehearse the torture I am going to inflict on her! Vasanthasena! I will drive a spear into your eyes... Set fire to your hair... I will drive sharp needles into your red lips... Shining cheeks! Ha, ha, ha... I will split them with a dagger. The body that turns on the onlookers I will cut it to pieces. The miraculous work of the formless has begun... Treacherous woman! Your former husband's task on revenge has begun. A walking serpent! Hell's dancer! Devil of deceit... Smiling spider...

* * *

(The scene at the palace begins with the sounds of laughter of Vasanthasena)

Vasanthasena: Mad girl! I can right now become the queen, if I want it!

Confidante: That is also my wish. But while the queen and the prince are still alive?

Vasanthasena: The queen and the prince are both living corpses. My very smile will fetch me the throne. A captivating look – the whole world will be at my feet! The beloved queen of the king am I! Just a thought will do – Vasanthasena is queen! Her son, Vasanthan, the prince!

* * *

(At a part of the palace)

Vasanthan: Yes, yes. There is no doubt, Jester! The son of the king is prince. I have no doubt about this.

Jester: Vasanthan! We have no doubt only in this? Really, we have no doubt whatsoever about anything.

(*Vasanthan and Jester sing: 'There's no doubt'*)

(At another part in the palace. Queen Padmavathy before the king's portrait)

Lord! Won't the day come to unite us together…? I have not done any harm to anyone in my life! I have even pardoned Vasanthasena who has ruined my life, because you, who love her so much, should not feel sad…! Even if I have done any harm to anyone, I do suffer having parted from you for many years! Won't this punishment do? Lord! The birthday of dear Manokaran is nearing. Let us both embrace our dear son, and offer him our loving wishes. Lord! The dear day, won't it ever come again!

* * *

(Inside the cave)

Master: Where are you going in a hurry, Kesarivarma?

Kesarivarman: To the play. I have arranged those men for the cast.

Master: I have forgotten. Isn't it Manokaran's birthday today? Hmm. What name have you given the play?

Kesarivarman: "The Battle Sword"

Master: Bravo! No obstacles for the play to go on...?

Kesarivarman: No! The Reason... They won't follow the story.

Master: What is Vasanthasena's pseudonym in the play?

Kesarivarman: Devasena!

Master: Your name?

Kesarivarman: Eswarivarman. I have changed the name of Purushothaman to Uttamapurushan.

Master: They will certainly understand the story.

Kesarivarman: They should!. Won't Purushothaman come to his senses even after that?

Master: Hmm. Try and see!

Kesarivarman: I shall go, great master!

Master: Be careful!

* * *

(*Palace. Vasanthasena is looking at the picture of Ukrasenan hidden in the pendant of the pearl necklace*)

Confidante: What, my lady, everyday whatever you forget, you don't forget this? What is there in the pendant that attracts the eye, like a magnet?

Vasanthasena: It is not a magnet, my friend! It is a god that helps during danger!

Confidante: God?

Vasanthasena: See...! (*Shows the picture*)

Confidante: Lady, the king comes.

Purushothaman: Isn't the make-up over yet? We are late for the play...

Vasanthasena: It is over now.

Purushothaman: Have you forgotten...? Today is Manokaran's birthday.

Vasanthasena: Will I forget his birthday? I was thinking about something else.

Purushothaman: What is it, Vasanthi?

Vasanthasena: The thirteenth year of the celebration of our love.

Purushothaman: Yes, darling... The years have fleeted.

(*He approaches Vasanthasena and caresses her*)

Vasanthan: Don't touch fire! It will burn you. Don't taste honey. You will be stung. I have no doubt about all these... No doubts... What new lesson today, mother? Mother! Oh! How beautiful mother looks!... If only I had a girl like mother!

Vasanthasena: You! Don't speak!

Vasanthan: Lord Ganesha asked for a girl like his mother, Parvati! Why should I not ask, father...?

Purushothaman: He won't get cured at all!

Vasanthan: No doubt, indeed.

Purushothaman: Vasanthi! I shall go... start soon.

* * *

(Manokaran's apartment)

Sathyaseelan: Treachery never prospered... Wickedness never lasted. Listen to this! The celebrations are for your sake. You should certainly come.

Manokaran: The celebrations are for my sake. True to the heart? No... a mere ritual.

Sathyaseelan: You are wrong, Manokara! Purushothaman doesn't lack paternal affections.

Manokaran: Your wish is, even that affection should not cease! But father is poisoned little by little.

Sathyaseelan: Whatever happens, people should not say there is trouble in the Royal family.

Manokaran: Lofty thoughts! But it should have dawned on her who is out to spoil the town.

Sathyaseelan: Manokara! Your birthday... If you are not there...!

Rajapriyan: The king won't care, as long as that 'pleasure-giver' is near!

Sathyaseelan: Both of you are young, and you are agitated!

Manokaran: To inculcate peace into folks is indeed the culture of the wise! But to be subservient, like the tortoise, is not in the character of warriors. The woman of tempting speech would come. There, my mother also should come. No! I can't bear to see that!

Padmavathy: Manokara!

Manokaran: Mother!

Padmavathy: Dear one! I came in, listening to you. Even Rajapriyan fell foul. Why! Dear Minister! Monokaran will certainly come to witness the play...
(Manokaran is silent)

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(The play is enacted at the palace.)

Kesarivarman (from behind the screen): What you are going to see is not fiction. It is a thoughtful presentation. The history of an empire ruined by a wily enchantress of a woman. Uttamapurushan, the king, is a paragon of virtue, a garden of Tamil rich. The breeze that cooled his heart, Kamalavathy, is the queen! Pandiyan, killed the father of the queen! Sculptor Eswarivarman brought this disturbing news! His wife, Devasena, is a cunning woman. She came softly like a breeze, but transformed herself into a storm. Scene of the entry of that smiling storm...

Kamalavathy: Father! Father!

Uttamapurushan: Don't cry, Kamala... Don't cry. Eswarivarma! Is there any news of uncle announcing anything in his final days?

Eswarivarman: Yes, my Lord... My grandson Ajayan alone should take revenge against Pandiyan. It is his responsibility too to redeem the throne of nine precious gems.

The burden of taking revenge is not for Uttamapurushan. This should be clearly indicated to Kamalavathy.

My blessings to the king! This is what your father wished to tell you, queen... The king died in peace, as soon as he said last that this sword should be handed over to you.

Uthamapurushan: Father....!

Kamalavathy: Father....!

Ajayan: Father....!

Kamalavathy: Ajay....!

Ajayan: Why do you cry, mother!

Kamalavathi: No, my dear Ajaya! Pandiyan who killed your grandfather...

Ajayan: Give me the sword....Right immediately I shall cut off his head, and bring it.

Kamalavathy: Yes, there is no doubt about this. When you grow up, you will certainly do this.

(As Padmavathy is watching the play, she touches Manokaran who is near).

Manokaran: What? Mother!....

Padmavathy: Nothing, dear! The play...

(In the play)

Eswarivarman: When is the answer to me then...!

Uthamapurushan: Varma! You should serve as the chief sculptor in my palace.

Eswarivarman: Lord! It is my good fortune.

Kamalavathy: If your wife is willing, let her be an attendant to me.

Eswarivarman: Our good fortune, queen!

Devasena: (Aside) An attendant I am. She, a queen who rules the world! If time changes...!

The Jester (seeing the play): Surely, she is a smart woman!

Sathyaseelan: Eighteen years ago, a sculptor thus came to the palace...

Rajapriyan: His name?

Sathyaseelan: Kesarivarman!

Devasena dances to enthral Uttamapurushan. The king presents her a pearl garland, as a gift.

Eswarivarman: (To Devasena) A good news for you. To conceive the construction of our country's Temple of Arts, I have to go round the entire Deccan region. That is the command of the king.

Devasena: This, a happy news to me! Hmm! O God!

Eswarivarman: This hurry isn't good... I am going to take you also with me.

Devasena: Is that true, dear?... Only now you are my golden beloved!... Oh! Until now, I have spent time like a caged bird. Dear, I shall now go and obtain permission from the queen.

(As planned, she falls down)

Devasena: Ah!

Confidante: Lady! Lady! You didn't listen...!

Eswarivarman: Sena!

Confidante: You have again fainted?

Varman: Then, even before this?

Confidante: What! Master! You speak as though you don't know. In nine months she will be a mother.

Varman: Ah! Sena is pregnant!

Rajapriyan at the play: Then, whose son is Vasanthan?

Sathyaseelan: See the play!

Rajapriyan: Play? Or is it real?

(In the next scene, King Uttamapurushan and Devasena sing a love-song: "Love in the Moon")

Kamalavathy: Hmm.. Night rounds are not over yet?

King: Yes... Yes... It has taken time. On the way something strange happened.

Kamalavathy: Your speech also is strange... Even my being awake here is unexpectedly strange to you. Lord! These fashionable dresses for night rounds in the city? Nice fragrance! Scented dot...! You look like a bridegroom just now returning from the wedding hall. Lord! Tell me who your new bride is.

King: Hold your tongue. Go away!

Kamalavathy: Contact with that low woman has made you so mean.

(The king slaps Kamalavathy on the cheek)

Kamalavathy: King! Exceeding the canons of just arguments, speaking in an upstart manner, you have hurt me without reason. So I am not prepared to see you hereafter. My eyes are reluctant to see you. After the grip of the power of harlot Devasena's friendship loosens, you may on your own make a return to see me. Know clearly, I won't come to see you on my own. Queen Kamalavathy may lack the beauty of your new Rathidevi. But very certainly a day will come in your life for you to realize that her sacred yellow thread has a special power. Do go. Do go to do your sacred duty!

King: Don't tell me! I am on my way out.

* * *

(Devasena to her maid)

Devasena: This dot is the sign... Drop the poison here. Be careful...

* * *

Vasanthasena (while watching the play):

King! I can't stay on anymore. My mind is agitated.

Devasena of the play: Dear... Hot milk. The headache will fly.

Varman: Sena! Lustful concubines mix poison in the milk and offer it to their husbands. You have heard of this?

Devasena: No dear. But in this milk there is no such thing...

Varman: When you say so, what fear have I? Sena! Come here... I have not handed milk to you for a long time.

Devasena: All that at the time of marriage...

Varman: Tut... Don't say so. Drink!

Devasena: Dear! It is like nectar.

Varman: All right! Give it to me. I shall drink it myself.

Devasena: Why so? I shall myself offer it to you… Hmm.

Vasanthan (watching the play): Don't! Don't! It's poison!

Devasena: Ha… Ha… Ha… Doesn't poison begin the work? The ways of smart ones are like this.

Varman: Vixen! Apart from being unfaithful, you kill your own husband, ah!

Devasena: I suffered immense pain on account of you. You separated me from Rudrasena, lover, dear as my life. When my thoughts are going to bear fruits, your remaining alive will cut the very roots… That is why I took the first step. None can stop your fate. For all fools who cannot carry on according to the minds of their wives, it is the same fate at all times.

(Varman dies. Vasanthasena, witnessing the play, screams to let the play stop)

(The sound alone is heard) She killed her husband! Rolled him into the jungle-river. Murderess! Still she lives! Still she lives!

* * *

(The zenana of Vasanthasena. Vasanthasena goes up and down in anger. Two soldiers arrive)

Vasanthasena: Where is the group of those who acted?

Soldiers: We gave a chase. They escaped.

Vasanthasena: You are bold! Aren't you ashamed? Tut! You run away.

Confidante: Why do you want those actors?

Vasanthasena: Why? To give away prizes!...

Confidante: They should certainly be given. Though it was a story that exposed us, the acting was good!

Vasanthasena: What kind of criticism is this? Get out! Yes!

(To herself) The play… It was written with me in mind. Kesarivarman alive?... No! No! A corpse cannot be alive. Perhaps…, the poison did not work properly.

(The king comes)

Vasanthasena: Lord! *(He sits with a sheepish smile)*

Vasanthasena: This is not the usual smile. You appear sad… What is the reason, Lord?.

King: Oh! Nothing

Vasanthasena: Why then did the soft word 'darling' not come from you? Your eyes look disturbed. Darling! Milk…?

King: Milk?

Vasanthasena: Why? Oh! The play has come to your mind...!

King: Not at all that...

Vasanthasena: Why speak with a sigh? Ask me. My husband, Kesarivarman... unable to see our love, ran away from town, as I told you.

King: Yes, now...?

Vasanthasena: Devasena of the play gives poison to her husband and kills him. You also took it to be true...

(She brings both the cups in her hands)

You can take whichever you like.

King: No... You give it yourself....

Vasanthasena: No. You take whichever you desire. Suspicion is an annoying disease. A dagger that cuts a life of love. It makes even a dauntless warrior a coward. Hmm.Take this. *(Thinking after some time)* Even that is not necessary. I shall myself drink both.

Pardon me, king. These thirteen years, I lived as your chaste wife; in the name of that I am asking you. Jewellery - a life of pomp - joys of the palace! Enough of them! Please give me a robe of saffron! A begging bowl to hold! Do not deny these. Please let me go...

King: Going out... you? Where, my darling?

Vasanthasena: The world is vast, Lord! I too shall become a drop in its crowd of people. I shall spend the rest of my life, pronouncing your name. They have planned to set fire to my joyous life at your feet!

King: Plan! Who?

Vasanthasena: Only the queen!

King: Who... Padmavathy?

Kesari's voice: No! A blatant lie, Ruler of the world. Don't fall a prey to sugary words!

Vasanthasena: Look Lord... Look. What I heard is true. The queen also works with magical powers... to separate me from you.

King: This should be attended to... (*To the guard*) Search who it was that spoke here. (*The guards run in the direction from where the sound came*)

* * *

Manokaran: A scented salve for the festering wound... Patient wait for destroying a wicked woman's play-acting. We have waited long enough, mother! Permit me. I will destroy beyond recognition that woman who corrupts the town.

Padmavathy: Manokaran! Wait...

(She hands over a sword to Manokaran)

Manokaran: Mother! One single stroke! Simulating Vasantha is gone!

Padmavathy: Wait son... I want you to be engaged in a more sacred activity.

Manokaran: What is that, mother?

Padmavathy: Do you know from where this sword came?

Manokaran: Even in the play there was a model like this... Yes, I saw it.

* * *

(At another place in the palace)

Sathyaseelan: The sword in the play was a duplicate! What I describe is a battle-sword! It belonged to Adhiveera Cheran, grandfather of Manokaran and father of the queen!

Rajapriyan: Adhiveera Cheran! In the play, the name in Adhitheera Sooran. Hmm... then?

Sathyaseelan: Pandiyan Muthuvijayan unexpectedly conquered the grandfather of Manokaran and captured the ruby-throne. The grandfather was wounded at the battle-front. He entrusted the responsibility of taking revenge upon Muthuvijayan to Manokaran, the child, and died. With his sturdy shoulders, Manokaran should carry out the wish of his grandfather.

Padmavathy: Yes, Manokaran! Muthuvijaya Pandian should be defeated. On the grave of your dead grandfather, you should shower petals of victory. Our ruby-throne should be redeemed.

Manokaran: Let me take leave. I shall let victory shower like rain. I shall break the ribs of the braggart Muthuvijayan. I shall make him an example to show how those who rob others' lands would fall like him.

Padmavathy: Dear son! My heart is pleased. Darling! You alone should remove the blot on our ancestry.

Manokaran: The blot on our ancestry was not due to Muthuvijayan alone. It was also by the wicked woman, Vasanthasena! This sword will not spare the crazy man who beat the drums of victory during a time of remissness, and also that villainous woman who intervened in your happy life!

Padmavathy: First do what I said. Get the blessing of your father!

* * *

(Drumbeats are heard in the street)

Drummer: War! Fierce war! War that is going to decide our honour and the future of our country. Warriors! Get ready! One from each home! Let us break the bones of the braggarts - hold aloft the flag of victory. Come! Come! For war..., war! War! *(the loud taps of the drum)*

Vasanthan: War! War! Dauntless warriors! Start for war! There two kinds of war (போர்) – one is haystacks வைக்கோல்போர் *(haystacks)*! There the cattle graze. The other is mere gossip (அக்கப்போர்)! The war I talk about is war in which heads break. Tiger-eyed warriors! Lions! Leopards! Rams! Start ferociously! Yes! Start! Why stand there! Cut away! Defeat! Kill! Disembowel!

(The dolls of warriors are now shown)

Jester: Bravo! Vasanthan! You are indeed a warrior!

Vasanthan: No doubt! No doubt!

(He draws the sword. Only the hilt is held. Vasanthasena comes. He aims an arrow)

Vasanthasena: Vasantha, what is this?

Jester: He is going to the battlefield. That is why...

Vasanthasena: Battlefield?... Dear! Why should you go?

Jester: That is where warriors go.

Vasanthan: Yes! Give me leave.

Vasanthasena: The body will be hurt. This proud job is not for you.

Vasanthan: Mother! Are you the one who speak like this! When the valiant mother heard the tidings that her son was wounded on the chest, she vowed to break the feeding vessel from which milk was fed to him, and when she saw him wounded on the back in battle, she was very happy. Are you the one hailing from that lineage, who speak like this! Coward! Coward!

Vasanthasena: Oh! It is my fate. Jester! I have asked the doctor to come. Let treatment begin for Vasanthan. The throne awaits him.

* * *

Manokaran: Father! Give me leave!

King: Manokara! Let the adversaries realize the glory of a valiant race! Make the pride of the enemies become dust unto dust!

Vasanthasena: Bring the victory wreath...

(Vasanthasena receives the wreath from the confidante)

I shall let my darling wear it.

Manokaran: Rajapriya! Warriors do not wear the victory wreath before victory is achieved.

(Vasanthasena's face changes)

Manokaran: I shall take leave...

King: May you crown with victory! May you live long!

(Both leave the stage)

King: Vasanthi! Angry, Darling!... Manokaran is young. Pardon him!

Vasanthasena: I have never been angry with him. He is my favourite son... Dear son. He may dislike me. But to me he is the bright moon! Star in the sky! Sugar cane juice!

King: Vasanthi!

* * *

(Outside the private chamber of Padmavathy)

Manokaran: Mother!

Padmavathy: Darling! *(she receives the salver from the confidante, and decorates Manokaran with a dot on his forehead)*

Padmavathy: Manokara! Make your mother and the glorious motherland happy. You must make your return as a triumphant hero.

Manokaran: Mother! If I win, the ruby throne will come! If not, the bloodied battle sword will come! Declare accordingly.

(He leaves in a chariot)

* * *

A wooded grove adjacent to the palace. Time of night.

(Vasanthasena stealthily comes in, expecting someone. Her confidante arrives.)

Vasanthasena: (*in a faint voice*) Where is Bouddhayanan?

Confidante: *(quietly)* Here he is.

(Bouddhayanan arrives from the direction shown by the confidante)

Vasanthasena: All right. You may go.

Vasanthasena: Bouddhayana! Do you start tonight?.

Bouddhayanan: Yes. Why?

Vasanthasena: Carry on cleverly.

Bouddhayanan: He won't return. Don't be worried.

Vasanthasena: The head should be at my feet.

Bouddhayanan: No chance! Danger to us if the head is brought. I will kill him at the battlefield itself and show you his battle sword.

Vasanthasena: Yes. The blame should be thrown on the enemies. Manokaran's death will remain a mystery!

Bouddhayanan: Oh!

Vasanthasena: A reward of a thousand gold coins to you.

Bouddhayanan: Lady, I will fetch the battle sword. You may offer me the bag of gold.

Vasanthasena: Bring me that pleasing news. Why gold only? I shall pour diamonds.

Bouddhayanan: Yes, lady.

Vasanthasena: Take care.

* * *

(Muthuvijayan's palace)

Soldier 1: King! Danger! Danger! The walls have fallen!

Soldier 2: The principal cupola of the tower is gone.

Soldier 3: The enemies are advancing.

Vijaya: Father! Should so much blood flow for the sake of this throne of rubies?

Muthuvijayan: Blood… Blood is a swimming pool for me! War to me is a hobby! Without knowing this, that wild fellow confronts me.

Soldier: Danger! Danger! The forces are scattered.

Muthuvijayan: Where is the chief commander? Where is that lion-hearted man?

Soldier 1: Famed death he has embraced, king! He died at the battlefield.

Soldier 2: The fish flag has fallen.

Muthuvijayan: Ah! I shall come now. Where are my forces?

(Manokaran climbs up the fortress wall amidst fierce opposition)

Muthuvijayan: Come, lad! A youth who can't wield the sword! Don't be deluded, thinking you have encircled the fort.

Manokaran: I have heard you are an expert in wielding the tongue!

(Muthuvijayan, in intense ire, swirls the sword…)

Muthuvijayan: In wielding the sword too…!

(Both are engaged in a fierce sword fight. At the portals of the fort, both armies fight fiercely. Finally, Manokaran's forces advance, making their entry into the palace.)

Muthuvijayan falls by the sword of Manokaran. Manokaran's forces enter the portals with a triumphant war-cry.

Rajapriyan flies aloft the tiger flag at the entrance of the fort.

* * *

(The private chamber of Vijaya)

Minister: The empire has set!

Vijaya: Ah!

Minister: In triumphant smile the king embraced death.

Vijaya: Father!

Minister: Please calm down.

Vijaya: Calm down? Father's death! The flag downed! The crown fallen! I shall sing the Victory song! Right tonight, I shall settle this!

* * *

(Manokaran's camp at night)

Bouddhayanan readies to throw the dagger to kill the sleeping Manokaran. Just then, Vijaya who enters with a drawn sword, in the garb of a soldier, unwittingly shouts "oh." Manokaran wakes up and grips the hand of Vijaya.

Manokaran: Who are you?

Vijaya: I am neither a ghost, nor a corpse, revived from the grave, created by you! I am an enemy who had escaped your eyes. A warrior of the Pandiya country!

Manokaran: A warrior from the Pandiya country! Yes. The army trained to take cover in the middle of the night and attack holds the top place in Muthuvijayan's reign! You, sans a backbone! Among these, you alone remain, with a sword in hand, and a heart of cowardice, don't you? Run away! Save your life!

Rajapriyan: The fellow should not be let free.

Manokaran: I pity him. Let him go. I have pardoned him.

Vijaya: I don't come in the tradition of seeking pardon.

Manokaran: But you are a great warrior who hail from the tradition of hiding and attacking.

Rajapriyan: Only those who cut off the heads of sleepers are trained at the schools of the Pandiya country. They are the heroic soldiers! Hapless coward! Get out!

Vijaya: Coward! A coward am I! See here… Right now, directly, I shall take revenge!

(She draws the sword. As Manokaran stops her, her headdress slips)

Manokaran: Ah! A woman!

Vijaya: The daughter of your enemy… She has come to take revenge…

Rajapriyan: Princess!

Manokaran: A wonderful scene! The hand that wears bangles holds a sword!

Vijaya: Don't speak! If a warrior you are, talk to me after triumphing over me!

Manokaran: No history there is of warriors conquering dart-eyed damsels, princess!

Vijaya: No need for mockery! Draw your sword.

Manokaran: My sword will play only at the battlefield. It won't cut fruits.

Vijaya: If you have the courage, if all your boast about the bold traits of warriors is not really a lash of your tongue, wield the sword. Let a proper judgement be obtained.

Manokaran: A proper judgement! The edge of the sword won't give that. Hereafter, it should be got only from a court of justice! Beautiful belle of Pandiyan! You are a prisoner now. A prisoner under protection. Rajapriyan! Take her away!

Rajapriyan: See our flag flying at the fortress's entrances! It is the flag that announces that the daughter of the king is a slave of Manokaran.

Vijaya: Don't speak! I lived as the daughter of a king - I won't live as a slave. I roamed like a skylark. I won't be caught by the fierce grips of the vultures. I was buoyed up by freedom's breeze. I won't be caught in this slavery's whirlwind. The lap of death is far better than falling at the enemy's feet.

* * *

(The private chamber of Vijaya. The song, "I do as a Woman Live' is heard)

Vijaya attempts to drink poison.

Manokaran (who comes in): Vijaya! Suicide is cowardly.

Vijaya: It is more cowardly to enter the private chamber of a woman, in darkness.

Manokaran: I don't mind. I have saved a tender creeper from the storm of death.

Vijaya: None need to stop this slave's death.

Manokaran: Slave! Who is a slave! You, a beautiful princess...

(Rajapriyan enters)

Rajapriyan: This is why I tell you, you should not enter the private chamber of a woman, in the middle of the night!

Manokaran: Rajapriyan! Do you know?

Rajapriyan: Aware of your mind only that I came Manokara! This is the time to be on guard. Don't be deceived! The princess, a little while ago, came as Death, to kill you!

Vijaya: I have also a good heart. Those with a good heart do wrong only once.

Manokaran: Vijaya! You are born to live. That apart, you are under my protection. I

cannot allow these dangerous acts.

Vijaya: Life is not a slave under you. That was given by God.

Manokaran: An explanation on this, at the court of enquiry tomorrow, please!

* * *

(The Pandiya People's Court)

Rajapriyan: She attempted to murder... She tried to commit suicide. She has committed untenable crimes. The daughter of a king stands before the People's Court! This Princess has attempted to separate Manokaran, our young prince, my dearest friend, and the paragon of the Chola dynasty. What punishment should be meted out to her should be decided on. Young Princess! Be prepared to receive the punishment that I am going to give you for life, before sunset tomorrow evening, at the Kali temple. No, I do not want to postpone the punishment by a day for the Pandiya country's beautiful belle Vijaya Devi's crime of attempting to kill the handsome Manokaran of the Chola country. Right today, right now, right at this very place, in the presence of everyone, you should garland Manokaran, and receive him as the bridegroom!

* * *

(The Pandiyan palace)

Manokaran: Vijaya! I thought you are the only beautiful maiden in the palace. I did not know a rival beauty is here.

Vijaya: Who?

Manokaran: (Pointing to the figure of Vijaya on the mirror) There! The dance of the diamond dews on the golden rose... That smile!

Vijaya: Let that remain! I am an enemy's daughter! Would your parents accept me?

Manokaran: I also doubted whether you would accept me, the one who is an enemy?

Vijaya: I loved your heroism. My motherland did not accept it. I was drawn to your handsomeness! Father's affection put a stop to it! Finally, your straightforward heart conquered me!

Manokaran: Speak darling..., speak! The honeyed waves from the nectarine sea of your lips, the epics of love your eyes heap writing, I shall keep enjoying. Queen of my heart! Speak a little more...

(The song, 'Beautiful Parrot, Speak' is sung)

(As they go singing in a boat, Bouddhayanan aims a dagger, but the aim is missed)

Manokaran: What? Vijaya?

Vijaya: Someone, throwing a dagger at you, is running away.... There!

Manokaran: There is some scheming. Let us start immediately. Come!

* * *

(The private chamber of Vasanthasena. Bouddhayanan comes in with Manokaran's sword).

Vasanthasena: Bouddhayanan...

Bouddhayanan: The battle-sword. I have brought it!

Vasanthasena: Well done!

Bouddhayanan: Lady! Victorious Manokaran has also married Vijaya.

Vasanthasena: So...

Bouddhayanan: Listen... They were swimming and playing. I made Vijaya a widow, and I came away with the sword.

Vasanthasena: Has Manokaran died?

Bouddhayanan: Surely, Lady! The prize money?

Vasanthasena: Here it is. *(She gives him a bag of gold.)* Bouddhayanan! Another matter. A single aim brings down two. If you tell this news to Padmavathy, her heart will break, and she will die. Then I am the queen. You are the prime minister.

Bouddhayanan: Prime Minister? Then I will do anything.

* * *

(Private chamber of Padmavathy)

Confidante 1: The fatigue in the war - The joy of a new wife. How will he come so soon....!

Padmavathy: I am very eager to see Vijaya!

Confidante 2: Lady! An ascetic wishes to see you urgently.

(Bouddhayanan comes in disguised as an ascetic)

Padmavathy: My respects...

Ascetic: May you be well, Queen! First of all, steel your heart.

Padmavathy: What?

Ascetic: The tidings I am going to give you are not sweet! Hm... Human life is a straw on the sea!

Padmavathy: You speak without any connection, reverend sir!

Ascetic: Only an ascetic has no connections. How happy you would have been on hearing the news of your son's victory!

Padmavathy: Yes, revered sir.

Ascetic: The heart that clasps happiness, and why does the same heart refuse to accept things sad?

Padmavathy: What has happened? Tell me!

Ascetic: Here... This battle sword will tell you.

Padmavathy: Ah!

Ascetic: Your son is gone... to the heavenly abode!

Padmavathy: Ah! Manokara!

"I have come!"*(A voice is heard. Even as she leans on the confidante, in shock, she turns back and looks, not trusting her eyes).*

Padmavathy: Manokara!

(Embracing Manokaran, she looks at him surprised.)

Manokaran: Mother! Why do you look like this? What happened? Who is this ascetic? *(Looking at the battle-sword in the hand)* Ah! My battle-sword. It was lost. How did it come here?

Padmavathy: Manokara! This cursed man told me you had departed from me.

Rajapriyan: Thief!... Not only did he steal the sword, he also wags his tail. Look at his beard! *(He catches hold of the beard. It comes away in his hand)*

Manokaran: Bouddhayana!

Rajapriyan: A new chapter in the plotting. If the battle-sword is shown, the queen will die. A fine strategy!

Manokaran: A sting in honey! Fellow! You tell us. Whose plan is this?

Padmavathy: Poor fellow! Spare him.

Manokaran: No mother! Rajapriyan, put him in prison!

Bouddhayanan: Only Vasanthasena is the cause of all this!

Manokaran: Vasanthasena! She should not be allowed to live anymore!

(Hurries away)

Padmavathy: Manokara! Stop. Where are you going?

Manokara: Mother! Now that I have fulfilled your vow, what does remain yet?

Padmavathy: I shall tell you. First put the sword into the sheath. Swear upon me that you will never do any harm to the king, or to Vasanthasena, without my permission.

Manokaran: Mother!

Padmavathy: Swear upon your mother!

Manokaran: I won't do any harm to the king.

Padmavathy: No! Vasanthasena too should be included!

Manokaran: The circling vulture! The jackal with an open mouth! The mountain snake that has encircled us! Kindness to her? No! Not at all!

Padmavathy: Your wish... Let the people of the land laugh at you saying that you are a son who doesn't obey the mother! Let the country laugh that I am a mother who has brought forth a disobedient son!

Manokaran: Alack! Not at all like that, mother! Here, I shall swear.

Padmavathy: Dear!

* * *

(The private chamber of Vasanthasena)

Vasanthasena: Bouddhayanan is a useless idiot. Cowardly fellow! He will certainly betray one. If I must escape, he should not be alive.

Confidante: Pity for Bouddhayanan!

Vasanthasena: Yes, If honey is to be obtained, many bees have to be killed. All right! Arrange according to what I told you.

(Prison house. The confidante of Vasanthasena carries a pot, and secretly talks to the guard. Later, the guard takes the pot and hands it over to Bouddhayanan.)

Bouddhayanan: The god that gifts will pour heavily from above. Long live Vasanthasena! *(As he opens the pot, a serpent with an extended hood comes out and bites him. Bouddhayanan is dead)*

* * *

The bedroom of Vasanthasena and the king. 'The day has dawned' is sung.

The ruby-throne is taken to the Assembly Hall. Vasanthasena looks at it. Vijaya pays obeisance to Padmavathy.

* * *

(The private chamber)

Vasanthasena: Tomorrow, a triumphant welcome to Manokaran. At that time I have to sit like a widow in a corner.

King: (*embarrassed*) Vasanthi! Don't talk like this. You can come to the Hall, enjoying all the honours.

Vasanthasena: Can I?

Vasanthasena: I am reluctant. I pity you! What can you do? Courtiers won't allow me. Though you may be an emperor, you are to fear the lay citizens.

King: No, you can come.

Vasanthasena: I may come, but whatever I am, can I, this unfortunate woman, who has always been thinking intently of your love, sit by you on the ruby-throne brought from the enemy land? Am I such a lucky one?

King: Why by my side? If I am powerful like Lord Shiva, I may even keep you on top of my head, like the Ganga!

Vasanthasena: If that is so then, tomorrow, at the royal court!

* * *

(The Assembly Hall, 'Long live Manokaran' is the cry all around. The king enters with Vasanthasena)

Courtier 1: Royal rewards for Vasanthasena? The king has been charmed.

Courtier 2: Because he is charmed, he has compromised the honour of this valiant country!

Courtier 3: Symbol of dishonour. The king with her... That too in the Royal Court!

Courtier 4: Oh! Sathyaseelan! What is this?

Sathyaseelan: The glowworm in the place of a star...

(Manokaran enters accompanied by the sounds of benediction. On seeing Vasanthasena on the ruby-throne, he boils over and groans "ah")

Rajapriyan: Manokaran! Mother's order!

Vasanthasena: Son! Do you remember you said you would wear the victory wreath only after victory in war? Here! This is the wreath I am going to bestow on my dearest.

Manokaran: Wreath? Tut! Victory wreath! By your hand! *(He draws the sword)*

Sathyaseelan: Manokaran! Do not disregard your mother's words.

Rajapriyan: Yes, Manokaran!

(Angry Manokaran slaps Rajapriyan on the cheek and rushes out)

* * *

(Private chamber of Padmavathy)

Manokaran: Mother!

Padmavathy: Manokara! What happened?

Manokaran: What you thought should happen by your tying my hands happened, mother! If I had only known earlier that you would issue me such a dangerous command, I would not have murdered Muthuvijayan, sacrificed many in our forces,

and brought the ruby-throne to let that wicked woman sit on it. She, on the throne you should have occupied?... And an invasion for that?

Padmavathy: The outcome of that invasion is this pretty parrot *(showing Vijaya)*, Manokara! Think of this and forget that!

(To Vijaya)

Vijaya, mollify your husband!

* * *

(A part in the palace. The physician is administering medicine to Vasanthan)

Physician: Yes! You should take this.

Vasanthan: Hey! Doctor! What is the name of this medicine?

Physician: Powder for self-awareness.

Vasanthan: What are the ingredients?

Physician: Prepared with grapes, honey, candy, and sugar.

Vasanthan: Will it be bitter?

Physician: No. It will be slightly sour. I have added two chillies.

Vasanthan: Doctor! What is my disease?

Physician: Incurable disease.

Vasanthan: Say that... But all say I am mad! Jester! Did you listen? I am not mad at all! An incurable disease!

* * *

(The cave. The master is engaged in finding means for medication)

Master: Before this medicine for invisibility is exhausted, we will surely succeed.

Kesarivarman: The quantity of the medicine has dwindled! Some more...

Master: Not necessary. Here! Medicine for deathlessness I will find right today.

Kesarivarman: (Pointing to the statue of Vasanthasena) Vasanthasena... Her heart should be taken out and wrung to paint the statue red. Her eyes...

(A loud report is heard. Surrounded by smoke, the mentor falls. Kesarivarman carrying the body, comes out. The master's condition is critical).

Master: Kesarivarma. My last wishes. Don't be in a hurry... to fulfil your aim... Enlist the help of Manokaran! I... I... *(dies)*

Kesarivarman: You toiled restlessly, to tell the world of a wonder medicine for invisibility. You didn't even show me the method. Respectful guru! All those who invented what is new have hidden it, never revealing it to the rest. You have also conducted yourself in the same way. Is this not a curse to the country?

* * *

(Celebration of the Spring Festival. Manokaran and Vijaya sing a song)

Vijaya: This love won't change at all?

Manokaran: What a question, Vijaya!

Vijaya: Not that. Suppose you also, like my father-in-law, are infatuated by a Vasanthasena?

Manokaran: Vasanthasena! Don't utter her name to me! That cur, in the place of my mother! I am not Manokaran, if I don't seat my mother in the Ceremonial Hall, letting that worm wallow in fire.

Vijaya: Ah! *(Vijaya gets up, shocked)*

Manokaran: What? *(Vasanthan comes out from below the seat)*

Vasanthan: You tread on my foot, sister-in-law!

Manokaran: Hey! Are you hiding here?

Vasanthan: Yes… If all women hit you with water, with flowers, with flowers in water, water in flowers, you will also hide.

Manokaran: (*Laughs*) Bold!

(Vijaya also laughs)

Vasanthan: Laugh, laugh…

(Vasanthasena arrives accompanied by the king)…

Vasanthasena: Vasantha!... Vasantha…!

Vasanthan: Mother! I am here! Mother! Brother and sister-in-law laugh at me!...

Vasanthasena: The town laughs at your brother for marrying Pandiyan's daughter. The whole world laughs at the wife of him who killed her father. *(Gritting her teeth)…* Let them laugh!... I shall destroy them all. You come!

Vasanthan: You can't do that! Brother is going to make you suffer like a worm. Beware! Just now, he told sister-in-law. Didn't he, sister-in-law?

Vasanthasena (In banter): Hmm. Even great warriors cannot do. Can this harlot's son achieve this?

Manokaran: Ah! What did you say? *(Draws the dagger)* See how I am going to cut to pieces the tongue that spewed poison.

King: (Stopping Manokaran) Manokaran! Drop it!

Manokaran: I won't! Even if you don't save the honour of your wife, I will protect the honour of my mother!

King: Listen to me!

Manokaran: No. If you have the power, save her.

Sathyaseelan: Manokara!

Vijaya: Dear! The promise you gave to aunt!

Manokaran: You!! *(He beats Vijaya)*

Manokaran: Mother!

(He goes out in confusion)

King: Vasanthi...! You exceeded your limits.

Vasanthasena: Lord!

King: Tut... Don't talk!

* * *

(The chamber of Padmavathy)

Manokaran: Mother... Mother... Mother! The speeding spear... the ferocious sword... I have stopped all these. This coquette who mocked at me, is she bigger than these? Only, I have come over here, having failed to oppose her. Because of whom? Because of you! Your injunction... Your vow!

Padmavathy: Manokara. Tell me the matter. What happened?

Manokaran: Self-respect was thrown to the floor. Valour was for sale. The symbol of shame dances in arrogance! Mother! You must immediately change your order.

Padmavathy: You have made a promise, my dear son!

Manokaran: Should a warrior become a coward! Should the vibrant shoulders sag? No... That drastic vow, I need not protect.

(Manokaran leaves, Vijaya enters)

Padmavathy: What happened, Vijaya?

Vijaya: That wicked woman Vasanthasena... *(sobs)*

* * *

(The king's chamber. Vasanthasena knocks at the door)

Vasanthasena: Lord! Vasanthi has come, Lord!

(The king walks about silently)

* * *

(The chamber of Padmavathy)

Padmavathy: Did she say so! The king stood by idly, after hearing that, Vijaya?

Vijaya: Yes, he did.

Padmavathy: His mother's words stopped Manokaran. What prevented Sathyaseelan? Did his voice show trepidation? Or his heart was full of cowardice! *(To the confidante).* Fetch Sathyaseelan. Go immediately. Bring him, right now!

* * *

(Vasanthasena is looking at the picture of Ukrasenan in the pearl garland's pendant)

Confidante: Why do you look at it now?

Vasanthasena: I have already told you. He is the god in need, in times of danger.

Confidante: Its help is not needed now.

Vasanthasena: Let it be. What have you gathered?

Confidante: Manokaran was in great wrath. The queen also was agitated.

Vasanthasena: Don't dilate. Narrate quickly.

Confidante: A friend was sent to fetch Sathyaseelan immediately.

Vasanthasena: At this time?

Confidante: Yes...

Vasanthasena: In darkness?

Confidante: Yes...

Vasanthasena: Sathyaseelan goes to the private chamber of Padmavathy - at night...

Confidante: To enquire about the incident at the Spring Festival.

Vasanthasena: I know that... Why is he sent for? This is also known. Only we should twist this.

Darkness - Padmavathy's private chamber! Sathyaseelan, there! This should be seen firsthand! Who should see who? We should make the king see it. We should find a way for this... Come.

* * *

(King's chamber. The confidante of Vasanthasena knocks at the door)

Confidante: King! King! Danger! Please open the door! Danger! The matter will go out of hand.

King: What is that?

Confidante: King! Alas!

King: Tell me the matter...

Confidante: Madam Vasanthasena... attempts hanging!

King: Ah!

Confidante: She is going to die. Only if you rush, she can be saved.

King: Where?

Friend: She went this way... Alas! Lady...

(They run. Under a tree, Vasanthasena stands as though she is attempting suicide by hanging)

Vasanthasena: God! Accept this slave at your sacred feet. My gratitude to the king

has turned out to be like water nurturing the weeds. He can't be blamed... Fate. Only I should go through all this.

King: Sena! Sena! *(Rushes)* Vasanthi...What have you done? What madness is this?

Vasanthasena: No. This is the prize, king, for true love. I don't want to live any more, even for a second. Right before your eyes I shall die. That indeed will be a great joy, Lord!

King: Vasanthi! Stop.

Vasanthasena: Leave me, Lord!

King: Vasanthi! Stop... Come here!

Vasanthasena: Leave me, king. On the edge of death, a request. Please carry it out. You should not suffer the ignominy of Vasanthasena committing suicide. You yourself kill me. Here is the dagger. Drive it into my heart that carries thoughts of you. I won't deem this as a stab from a knife. I shall consider this as a last kiss given by my beloved. Yes. Don't hesitate. Why this hesitation, Lord!

King: Vasanthi! Are you mad?

Vasanthasena: After losing your love, am I to live for anyone else?

King: Vasanthi... I have blabbered in anger.

Confidante: What an anger! If there had been some delay, death would have taken place. Liars should go to heaven. You should go to hell. What justice is this?.

Vasanthasena: What philosophy do you speak? Without respect even to the king?

Confidante: My heart boils! The queen...

King: What?

Vasanthasena: Shut up! Leave this aside.

Confidante: Beat me. Kiss me. I don't care. One day the truth should come out. A thief of many days should be caught one day.

Vasanthasena: Malini!. Won't you go?

Confidante: I shan't, queen! Come and see the queen's private chamber! What business has Sathyaseelan there in the middle of the night?

Vasanthasena: Alack! Alack!

King: Ah! Is that so? Is that true?

(The king rushes. Vasanthi's and the Confidante's laughter is heard)

* * *

Padmavathy's chamber

Padmavathy: Do ask the king, Minister! We'll hear what he says.

Sathyaseelan: The king won't attend to all these.

Padmavathy: When I think of Manokaran, I am afraid.

Sathyaseelan: No need for fear. I shall attend to it. *(The king and Vasanthasena listen, hiding)*

Vasanthasena: The king won't attend. No need to fear about Manokaran.

(Suspecting Padmavathy, the king returns. A secluded place)

King: (Looking at the moon) Blot... Blot... A blot my lineage had not witnessed! Treacherous woman!

(He breaks the statue of Padmavathy that stands nearby)

Vasanthasena: Lord! Be calm.

King: Peace! I shall have peace only in her death.

Vasanthasena: Listen to this, king! The queen...

King: Queen? Don't mention it again! She has lost her honour! Nomad! Harlot! Vasanthi! You command! She must be put in the cellar.

Vasanthasena: Imprisoning the queen will assuage your ire. At the Spring Festival, Manokaran who jumped about in anger, because I blamed his mother – What will he say now! Will he beg my pardon?

King: I shall tell him to do so. For speaking against you, I shall ask him to beg your pardon, at the Ceremonial Hall itself. Prison for Padmavathy! Manokaran should beg pardon before Vasanthasena.

* * *

(Padmavathy's chamber)

Manokaran: Mother should go to prison! Manokaran should beg pardon!

Rajapriyan: That too at the Ceremonial Hall. Before that woman, the owl on the trashheap!

Manokaran: It is the father that commands!

Padmavathy: Yes, dear! Don't forget it. Your father.

Rajapriyan: Father! He has a son with a fearless heart. His wife is an epitome of virtue. What he did not get was, wisdom, mother, wisdom! That alone he forgot to acquire!

Manokaran: I shall remind him of what is forgotten.

Padmavathy: Darling! Do I say you cannot! Father could have made a mistake in a hurry. However, you better go and ask for the reason.

Manokaran: Ask for reason?

Vijaya: Aunt! No! Don't send him. No, aunt! Don't !. My husband should not go!

Padmavathy: My valiant son! Go...

Vijaya: No, aunt.

Padmavathy: Vijaya!

Manokaran: I shall take leave. *(Seeing the soldiers who come to arrest Padmavathy)* Beware! You should not go near my mother until I come back...

* * *

The king's Court Hall.

Rajapriyan: King! A storm is going to blow. The palace is going to become a mound of dust!

King: Rajapriya!

Rajapriyan: Hearing the urgent command of the king, Manokaran marches like a lion!

King: Ah!

Rajapriyan: He comes calmly. But a volcano doesn't warn before it rumbles. Prison for the queen! Manokaran should beg pardon! Lord! Can the tiger be trifled with? A warrior's anger will wreak havoc! Take back your order! If not, sparks of fire will fly! Sparks of fire will fly!

(Vasantasena in trepidation)

King: Don't fear! Let me see the spark of fire! Yes.... Bring him chained.

Soldier (comes to Manokaran): The king's command! You should be put in chains and brought to the Hall.

Manokaran: Shackles?

Padmavathy: Shackles? It's inviting disaster. *(To the confidante)* Bring my shawl!

(Rushes)

Sathyaseelan: Manokara! You are going to the Hall for ascertaining the reason. What does it matter how you go? The shackles are only for the hands, not for the mouth!

(Manokaran is dragged in shackles)

King: Manokaran! You know why I have brought you here?

Manokaran: Correct yourself, please. I have not been brought here, but dragged here.

King: You would have been aware of my command!

Manokaran: Is this a command? A futile wish! He whom you happily bedecked in gold, gems and diamonds, whom you fondled as darling, precious pearl, dear Tamil song, and placed him on an ivory cot, a sandalwood cradle, and called him a valiant warrior, a child that suffused your eyes, and whom you hailed as one who came

from a race of dauntless men – he, that Manokaran, you have chained and made him stand in this Hall. Great joy you have experienced and this is your insatiable desire. Is this called a command, dear father?

Courtiers: Oh! Oh!

King: You are an accused before justice, and not a son before his father, now!

Manokaran: Accused! Yes! Whom did I harm? Who were affected by my deeds? King! I ask, not as a son before his father, but as one from among the subjects. Did I commit a murder? Did I plunder? Did I do anything sinister and subtle to topple the Government? What crime did I commit? What crime did I commit, king? Won't you tell me? You need not.

Here are Ministers of Justice. Great warriors from a dauntless race. Peoples' representatives, the voices of the country there are. Let them say what crime I have committed.

Courtiers: The king should certainly make known the crime.

King: This does not concern you.

Manokaran: If this be so, why should it come to the Hall? Dear king! History meets for the first time the wonder of a family quarrel coming to the Royal Court.

King: Enough! You stop. For the wrong you committed at the Spring Festival, you should seek Vasanthasena's pardon.

Manokaran: I ask the reason for that.

King: For those who oppose, you know what punishment there is in the Royal Court?

Manokaran: A lesser punishment it should be than what must be given to one for sending a duly married queen to prison and offering the crown to a person who remained huddled in a corner.

King: Don't make me angry. Carry out the king's order!

Manokaran: Why the king's order? Be it even God's command, people have begun to ask for reasons, king! Even after hearing that the mother should go to prison, the one who lies low is a tortoise!

King: Fool! You do not know the difference between father and mother! Have you heard of Parasuraman who cut off the mother's head, on being commanded by the father?

Manokaran: Parasuraman is an *Avatar*! Manokaran is a human being!

King: Are you going to obey my order or not?

Manokaran: I shall carry it out. Manokaran should beg pardon?

King: Yes. That too in half a second!

Manokaran: Why half a second? Even before that. But do you know from whom I should ask pardon? A beautiful woman, a statue in onyx, a cooing cuckoo, a playful gazelle - this is how this woman with a perverse mind is praised by you - her evil eyes - her cruel tongue, after making her a prey to my sharp sword, and if you oppose, killing you and the supporting forces, and sending those who flattered this sorceress to death, I should rush to my mother, with my swirling sword, and gathering glory, I should beg her pardon... Shall I carry out that order? Are you ready?... Are you ready?....

Why tremble? Ha... Ha... Purushothaman, a tiger in war, if he wielded the sword, the whole world would be stunned. Is he the one who is so afraid? What a pity! The fingers, that tested the sharpness of a spear, are now caressing the fingers of a traitor. The eyes, that saw war camps, are now enthralled by the tempting grace of a snake dance. The mind, that contemplated fortresses and battlements, is now cooling itself beside a ruined wall!

King: You are forbidden to speak!

Manokaran: The town speaks - the world speaks!

King: Yes,... that you are a harlot's son.

Manokaran: Ah!

King: Is it sweet to hear! A thousand times I shall say you are a harlot's son.

Manokaran: Ha! Mother! Enough of your speech, king! Now, I shall tear your mouth to pieces.

(The chains break)

Sathyaseelan: Manokara!

Manokaran: None should interfere. Manokaran's anger won't even consider who is good, or who is bad. Let me go. Take off your hands.

Manokaran: O Purushothaman! You who find the world in the rolling eyes of a fraudulent woman! You who have come as a blot to the line of dauntless kings who lived deeming honour alone as noble life! Man of brilliant brains, who cannot distinguish between a peacock and a monkey! You are the blind who call the cool moon a fiery brand! My mother is the birthplace of love, the foundation of the moral paths of life, an image of compassion, a sacred symbol of chastity, a blemishless ruby, the sterling gold! I shall dismember you for dishonouring her. The body of this wicked woman who induced you to speak so treacherously I shall cut to pieces. If you have the courage, if you are strong in the shoulders, draw your sword, and stop your death! If you have not the courage, if you have become a coward, by the tempting smile of this coquette , flee from here! Show your back and run! To prove *Kalingathupparani* is wrong, show your back and run. Dusty

winds that have come to cover the glory of *Puranaanooru!* Utter darkness! Run! Run! Run, tripped by the feet! Wail and run. Cry 'oh' and go..., why? You feel insulted? You little worm who dishonoured my mother! Why have you turned yourself a statue? Hey! Kingly icon! A devotee intent on revenge has come for worship! Stay as you are! Stand just motionless! I shall perform ablutions with the blood of this sorceress. With the guts of this destructive woman, I shall garland you. I shall garland you who used to praise her as one with a smile, bright as jasmine, in your heady infatuation. I shall remove the teeth and offer them to you in worship! Sinner! See! Great sinner, who insulted your wife! See how you and your queen in bed are going to suffer!

Padmavathy: (As she comes to grasp the sword) Drop the sword!

Manokaran: Who are you? *(In surprise)*... Mother! Mother! How did you come here? Mother! Your sacred footsteps should not tread this place where deceit rules!

Padmavathy: Manokara!

Manokaran: Forbear for a while, mother! *(looking at the king)*... Where do you attempt to run? Stop!

Padmavathy: Manokara! Don't you forget yourself.

Manokaran: Mother! Had you heard the cruel words that were uttered in this Ceremonial Hall a little while ago, you would not have spoken like that. Wait, I shall come.

(Manokaran draws the sword. Padmavathy, as she stops it, is injured in the hand).

Manokaran: Mother! No harm... For every drop of blood that is shed from your sacred, golden hand, those wicked ones are indeed answerable.

Padmavathy: They insulted only me!

Manokaran: Leave me! Even if my mother stops me from taking on him, who insulted my mother, I won't stop.

Padmavathy: If it is true you are my son, listen to me.

Manokaran: Mother!

Padmavathy: First, drive the sword into my womb, wherein you grew, and then go to the king. Standing on the corpse of your mother, you fight with your father. Yes. Here is your mother. Kill me! Then you act according to your principles. Why do you stand there?

Manokaran: Mother!

Padmavathy: I am not going to be talking any more. The one I vowed not to meet, I had to meet because of you. To beg in the Hall like this before the son is also an

intolerable dishonour!

Manokaran: What do you want me to do now, mother?

Padmavathy: Give me the sword!

Manokaran: Shall I beg pardon also?

Padmavathy: Manokaran! My jewel! Your mother was not born into a family of cowards. Nor was I the wife of a coward. I did not also bring forth a coward. My precious one! It is better to die than to beg any pardon.

King: Yes. That is also my judgement. This wicked fellow should not be left alive. Death for Manokaran.

Manokaran: Ha! Mother! Permit me at least now. I shall crush these mean people. Patience even after this, mother?

Padmavathy: Patience only now.

Manokaran: If that is so, what about me?

Padmavathy: You have to die.

Manokaran: Should I die? Your son, Manokaran! Should he die?

Padmavathy: Yes! The father killing the son, and the mother, consenting to it, is a rare good fortune, my precious one! In this world, who will get this royal fortune? Go, my son, go, to die!

Manokaran: Mother! Are you the one who says so?

Padmavathy: Yes! The mother who brought you forth! I myself declare; Do die!

Manokaran: Mother! Am I to part from you?

Padmavathy: Even I am determined to part from you.

Manokaran: Mother! Mother!

(Manokaran faints and falls to the ground)

Courtiers: Release the Prince!

Unjust sentence!

Unjust sentence! Unjust sentence!

Padmavathy: Be calm! Sathyaseelan! Arrange to carry away Manokaran, to the place of execution!

Courtiers: No! The judgement is unjust, unjust!

Padmavathy: Let no one speak. He is my son. I shall treat him the way I like! After his death sentence is carried out, even his burial will take place only outside this empire!

(Clasping Manokaran's hand) My son! If this is going to be the last kiss to you, let

our graves next meet!

(She leaves)

* * *

(The king's private chamber. Vijaya rushes in and falls at his feet)

Vijaya: Uncle! Why do you tear and throw away the petals of a rose that has bloomed? Why have you cut the green branch of the blooming jasmine? I followed him because of pure and noble love. Why have you pushed me into the waves of sorrow, uncle? Please tell me, uncle . Hereafter, is my life to be a desert? My heart, a dark room? Is there no redemption, uncle?

King: The matter is over. No profit in digging it up.

Vijaya: What is over, uncle? The bond between father and son? The kinship between husband and wife? Even if both these are over, as far as you are concerned, place yourself in my position. I am the daughter of your enemy. Your noble son had captured my heart. Can you subject your son, who has a heart that will attract even the enemy to him, to injustice?. Strange is this not, that the father himself does this, uncle? Why did the princess of the Pandiya country come to the palace of the Chola land?. To be turned into a doll of misery...? To lose the joy of life? Do tell me, uncle.

Vasanthasena: She just takes after her mother-in-law.

(As she comes in)

Vijaya: I am speaking to my uncle.

Vasanthasena: Uncle! The king is your uncle? All the problems arose because of that doubt!

Vijaya: Tut! Shut up, you strumpet!

Vasanthasena: What did you say? The wife to the son of a strumpet! What did you say?

Vijaya: Ah! Vasanthasena!

(She throws the dagger! The aim misses)

Vasanthasena: Daggers don't reach queens of chastity. Even gods cannot near them.

King: Vasanthi!

(Looking at Vijaya)

You wicked one! You were about to destroy my desires in half a second!

Vasanthasena: King! A plot is being hatched to finish me!

King: Don't be afraid. I shall put an end to this plot. Who goes there? *(The guard comes)* Imprison both Padmavathy and Vijaya in the cellar. Yes! Let this be car-

ried out!

Vijaya: Uncle!

(Manokaran who has fainted is taken out in a chariot. Sathyaseelan and guards follow from behind!)

Just then, the invisible figure (Kesarivarman) stops the chariot. The guards run away in fear. The formless one drives away the chariot. Rajapriyan follows after.

* * *

(Palace)

Guard: King! The Prince has escaped.

King: What?

Vasanthasena: Ah! Has Manokaran escaped?

Guard: Yes, Madam… Someone removed the binds and saved him. We could not see him.

Vasanthasena: Danger enlarges, Lord! Search the entire town. Wherever that destructor is, let him be captured.

King: Yes… Go

* * *

(The cave. Manokaran wakes up from his swoon)

Manokaran: Mother! It is not possible, not possible. *(Looking around)*. What is this? I am alive, after being killed!

Kesarivarman: Prince!

Manokaran: Who are you? Sathyaseelan! Who is he?

Sathyaseelan: The details I will tell you later. He is the one who has saved you.

Manokaran: Saving me! Saving Manokaran! The king's wishes… Mother's loving command… Carry these out immediately! Kill me! Kill me! Rajapriyan! My beloved friend! At least you carry out my mother's command.

Sathyaseelan: Be patient, Manokara!

Rajapriyan: Manokara! Because a mother's words are to be obeyed, should you let your mother die in prison like an orphan?

Manokaran: Ah! Mother in prison?

Rajapriyan: Not only mother, but also Vijaya!

Manokaran: Ah!

Rajapriyan: At least now, you better know the need for you to live.

* * *

(Prison)

Vijaya: He, who had the power to save his life and that of others, has finally escaped with his life, by the point of the sword. All this calamity by your good faith, aunt! Where did he go at all? Wherever would he be wandering?

Padmavathy: Eat, Vijaya.

Vijaya: No aunt!

Padmavathy: A pregnant woman should not go without food. You should eat at least for the child that grows in the womb. Do eat.

Vijaya: Aunt! This gruel?

* * *

(Vasanthasena's private chamber)

Vasanthasena: This is excellent!

Confidante: This fruit juice makes the body glow!

Vasanthasena: Knowing that only, I chose this, Malini! There was a beauty somewhere, they say, who bathed in donkey's milk to preserve her shining body.

Confidante: That is not a wonder, lady. If you asked, Purushothaman would bring even tiger's milk!

Vasanthasena: Is there any doubt about that?

Confidante: This apart, you are so careless. Manokaran also has escaped. Should not Vasanthan's coronation be conducted soon?

Vasanthasena: Is this a big affair? I am the king's Bible indeed. If I called the bright moon the sun, he would certainly believe me. Don't be anxious. By a mere signal of my eye, Vasanthan's coronation can be done!

* * *

(Another place)

Physician: Rajathi Raja Rajamarthanda...

Jester: Raja Gambeera... Rajakolahala...

Physician: Raja Veera Theera Parakkrima...

Jester: Ranaranga Veera Soora....

Physician: Vasantha Maharaja who drinks saltless gruel by the gallon, Parak! Parak!

Vasanthan: Thom... *Thom. Vanthom*... (I've come)

Jester: Vasantha! Look here. Mother will chide. Get up... It should appear as though you are in the Royal Court of the king. Now you should do what I tell you to do. Sit on this, king!

Now you should say, as I tell you. Now, who are you?

Vasanthan: Now, who are you?

Jester: Tut… Reply.

Vasanthan: Tut… Reply.

Jester: Oh! Reply, king?

Vasanthan: Oh! Reply, king?

Jester: You should reply that you are the "king"!

Vasanthan: Yes… Yes… king!

Jester: Ah! I am the minister!

Vasanthan: Hmm.

Jester: He? *(indicating the physician)*

Vasanthan: I know… Queen! Come, come, sit down!

Jester: King! He is the commander-in-chief. Now, who is the queen?

Physician: We can keep Malini who is over there. Come.

Jester: (Looking at Malini) Listen to me. For today you are the queen. Go and sit with the queen.

Vasanthan: (Grinning)… Bravo!

Jester: If ever a king from another country comes smiling, you must smile and speak. If he comes in anger, you must speak angrily.

Vasanthan: Yes! Minister!

Jester: Yes! Let the Royal Court begin.

Vasanthan: Commander-in-chief! Let the dance begin.

Physician: Tell the queen to dance.

Jester: Yes, King! You see, there is no one else. So let her dance!

(Malini dances)

Vasanthan: Hmm. Dance! All are equal in our land. All can dance! Women who do not know dancing are not women at all! Isn't it right, Jester?

Jester: Nowadays, even women walking is like a dance indeed!

(Purushothaman comes)

Vasanthan: Oh! Oh! A king from another country? You come happily or angrily?

King: Enough, keep quiet!

Vasanthan: Oh! He comes in anger. Hey! Brainless king! Foolish king! Where have you come? Why have you come! The reason for your coming to the court of Vasanthan?... Minister! Is the anger enough?

King: Hey! Jester! What fun is this?

Jester: Coronation celebration - His mother wanted a rehearsal to be done!

King: Hey! Physician! Are you trying to lessen his madness by medicine, or!

Vasanthan: Madness? Who said so? This is an incurable disease.

* * *

(Wooded grove)

Vasanthasena: You have come, Lord! I am waiting at this path in the grove. You have come by the palace.

King: Whatever the path, Vasanthi! Does the glow of light in your words, in your honeyed eyes change?

Vasanthasena: How will it change? Ahalya for Indra, Tara for the moon and Vasanthi for Purushothaman!

King: Darling Vasanthi! I don't know what to talk with you.

Vasanthasena: Be dumb! I shall delight in its handsomeness!

King: Whatever you ask for I shall give now.

Vasanthasena: That is the hitch. I am not going to ask for what I thought of asking…

King: Why Vasanthi?

Vasanthasena: You will say, this woman of pretence has chosen to ask at an opportune time. Am I Kaikeyi who cheated Dhasarathan? No… No!

King: What is that? Do ask!

Vasanthasena: No… No!

King: All right, I shall go.

Vasanthasena: Alas! My life will set. Please sit down.

King: Then, tell me.

Vasanthasena: Manokaran has left the country.

King: Why do you dig that up?

Vasanthasena: A land without a prince is like a painting without beauty.

King: What should be done…?

Vasanthasena: Why! If we make Vasanthan the prince…

King: Madness! You are more mad that Vasanthan himself!

Vasanthasena: Lord!

King: He shouldn't be made prince. He should be crowned a leader of the mad. If he is crowned, first you are mad, then I am mad, later, the whole country is mad.

Vasanthasena: Enough! Enough! Don't start describing. Vasanthasena deserves this, and much more too!

King: I took you to be an intelligent woman. *(Angrily)* You are a big zero!

Vasanthasena: Call me a fool three thousand times over. I shall be happy - But don't ever think that your Vasanthi is a traitor. He is not my son alone. He is your son too. What greater desires have I? Your pleasure is my goal… not selfishness.

King: Don't I know, my beloved! But Vasanthan…!

Vasanthasena: Let us not talk about that. It is a risky proposition. I know what will happen if a mad one is crowned. I just poked fun at you. But before that.. you were indeed...

King: Vasanthi!

Vasanthasena: Lord! The moonlit patio looks for us! Come

Vasanthasena: (Aside)

No point in trusting Purushothaman any more. A new plan should be got ready. This ungrateful king should be outlawed. Manokaran must be killed. Vasanthan should be crowned. Only my old lover, Ukrasenan will be useful for all these.

(Vasanthasena goes into the room. Vasanthan follows. Vasanthasena writes a letter. The invisible being follows her. Vasanthasena trembles)

Vasanthasena: Who goes there! A cruel fellow is caught inside. Don't let him escape!

(The invisible being beckons Vasanthan)

Vasanthan: Are you a ghost or god?

Invisible being: No Vasantha. I am a man.

Vasanthan: Are you a man? I don't see you.

Invisible being: I won't be visible. My revered guru's grace. The result of knowledge. The effect of a medicine.

Vasanthan: Will you give me a little quantity of that medicine?

Invisible being: I shall give. But you should do what I tell you to do. First tell a soldier to come. *(As the Jester calls, a soldier comes. The invisible being slips away, after binding him up. Vasanthasena writes a letter and drops it into a cage).*

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(The cave)

Kesarivarman: The wicked woman has prepared a letter. The last message to get her efforts succeed. If we became a little slack, that would be our end.

Sathyaseelan: Tell us the matter, Varma!

Kesarivarman: The villainous woman tried to get Vasanthan crowned. The king refused. So she has sent a message to enemy Ukrasenan to invade the country and let Vasanthan become the king.

Manokaran: Ukrasenan! King of Imayapuri?

Rajapriyan: Yes. He who is waiting for an opportune time to enter our empire.

Kesarivarman: The messenger who should be bringing a reply from Ukrasenan would be coming by this way only. Let us go and see.

(Akshayan comes riding. Manokaran stops him)

Manokaran: Who are you?

Akshayan: Are you asking me? I am what I am!

Kesarivarman: Where are you going?

Akshayan: Where I should be going.

(Manokaran and Rajapriyan attack him and tie him to a stone-pillar. Manokaran takes the letter from Akshayan).

Dear Vasanthasena!

Take the help of Akshayan, attend to what should be done within the palace. I shall also come with the forces. We will finish Purushothaman, and let us begin a new life.

Ukrasenan

Rajapriyan: Treachery. This should not happen!

Manokaran: We shall start right now. That perverse woman should be eliminated.

Kesarivarman: If you destroy her, your heroism will come to the fore. The harlot's simulation won't be known. Dear Prince! Killing her in half a second is not what I have been longing for all these days. I too could have done this. I would have done this long ago.

Manokaran: Why did you not do this?

Kesarivarman: Discretion, Prince! Discretion. If she had been killed at that time, the king who had lost his judgement would have shed tears. Her designs would not have been known. The world would not have known about her deceptions. Our strategy is not to kill her. It is only to expose her scheming.

Manokaran: The way for it?

Kesarivarman: Like diamond cutting diamond, we should defeat craftiness only by clever strategy. Come, I shall tell you.

* * *

(King's palace)

Guard: Lord! A man who is a great expert in curing madness has come!

King: Is that so? Take him to Vasanthi.

Guard: As you order!

(Vasanthasena's private chamber. The guard shows Manokaran in the guise of Akshayan)
Madam!... The king has sent this man to you. It seems he is an expert physician.

Vasanthasena: Who?

Disguised Akshayan: I am a physician. My name... Ukrasenathoothan,

(Realizing who he is)

Vasanthasena: Long name!

(Manokaran extends the letter to Vasanthasena. After her reading the letter)

Your name?

Disguised Akshayan: Akshayan!

Vasanthasena: You have completely deceived the king!

Disguised Akshayan: Yes. None can find out who I am.

Vasanthasena: All right. You do continue to act like a physician. I shall attend to the rest.

Disguised Akshayan: Acting well is not at all difficult. Oh!

* * *

(Another place)

Vasanthan: Hey! Doctor! Calling for medicine all the time, why do you take my life out!

Physician: That is what I am trying, but I am unable to do it.

Vasanthan: What are you trying? To take my life out?

Physician: No! No! By the grace of God, to let you live long... to let this disease last, to let the job of this humble self also last, I shall ever pray to the God of Death.

Vasanthan: Hey! Doctor! Does the God of Death have a vehicle of his own?

Jester: The buffalo bull! That is why he reaches the bad slowly.

Vasanthan: Yes. No doubt... No doubt...

Jester: Doctor! First I convey to you my deep sympathies.

Physician: What Jester?

Jester: Uncertain life... Here, a new physician has come for Vasanthan!

Physician: Then, what about me?

Jester: Keep apart for a while.

(Manokaran arrives in the guise of Akshayan)

Vasanthan: Hey! New Doctor! What all do you know?

'Akshayan': Without giving medicine I will drive away the disease!

Vasanthan: If this is so, you are certainly the new doctor. No doubt... Hey! Old doctor! You run away.

* * *

(Ukrasenan's encampment)

Ukrasenan: Veerasimha! We may have to start suddenly. Are all our troops ready?

Veerasimhan: Ready, Lord!

Ukrasenan (Handing over a message): Enter the palace of Purushothaman. Give this to Akshayan through Vasanthasena.

* * *

(Vasanthasena's private chamber. A message comes through a messenger. Having read the letter she speaks to disguised 'Akshayan'.

Vasanthasena: Ukrasenan has come. All others arrive at the palace as ascetics.

Disguised Akshayan: Ascetics! Disguise!

Vasanthasena: What, Akshayan?

Disguised Akshayan: Nothing! Only in the guise of ascetics, these have undone many an empire.

Vasanthansena: Is that so! Yes... How to get them into the palace?

Disguised Akshayan: This should be thought out.

Vasanthansena: Why think about it? I shall arrange in half a second.

(The procession of Ukrasenan's ascetics is received with ceremonial drums and pipes and devotional recitation. The king and Vasanthasena receive the gathering of ascetics and attend to them, with religious devotion and hospitality)

King: Welcome! Welcome! I am the blessed.

Ukrasenan: May gods supreme shower their grace upon you, King Purushothaman! The world is a stage. Who will ever know what is to come!

King: True, true!

Ukrasenan: So, this is the queen!

King: (Nods his head)

Ukrasenan: Queen! You will live after your heart. All your thoughts will reach fruition.

Vasanthasena: Vasanthan! Pay your obeisance to the guru!

Vasanthan: Let me gain the kinship of the good who supplicate thy holy feet in singleness of devotion!

I have forgotten the script... Jester!

Vasanthasena: Enough! enough!

Ukrasenan: May you prosper, king! I have come at the propitious time. A great danger awaits you!

King: Revered guru?

Ukrasenan: If you should escape from the danger, you and the queen should be away from each other right from now till tomorrow morning.

King: Is that so!

Ukrasenan: If not, death will occur.

Vasanthasena: Should I part from the king?

King: Only till tomorrow morning, Vasanthi.

Ukrasenan: Yes. Be separate, be separate.

Vasanthan: I remember! Let me forgo the friendship of the false-hearted.

Vasanthasena: Vasantha...

Vasanthan: Let me ever forget the lust for women!

King: Hey! Be quiet!

Vasanthan: Let me be endowed with the strength of wisdom!

Vasanthasena: Vasantha!

(Vasanthi exits)

Ukrasenan: King! All by God's will! This body should rest for some time.

King: I shall make arrangement immediately.

(The king goes. The forces of Ukrasenan, in the guise of ascetics, spread out all over the palace, killing all the guards and occupying their places)

* * *

(The cave)

Manokaran: Saffron robes - Forces within, carrying arms! Have entered as if a sluice opened... in the garb of ascetics, without any obstacle. Even if we delay a trifle, the Chola kingdom will be enslaved. Start at once.

Rajapriyan: Yes, that's right. This should be stopped.

Sathyaseelan: Wait. We are bold at heart to defend our motherland. At the same time, we should also just think of enemy's strength. We shall send Rajapriyan to the Pandiya country. If forces from the Pandiya country arrive, we shall start our battle!

Kesarivarman: Good counsel, Prince! You go immediately to the palace. Only then can you watch over mother, father and wife, to prevent any danger to them. We shall attend to the rest!

Sathyaseelan: Manokara! You start at once. Rajapriyan! You set out for the Pandiya

country immediately.

* * *

(Prayer room)

Ukrasenan: Who is this? Oh! Queen Vasanthidevi?

Vasanthasena: Guru is full of thoughts of God?

Ukrasenan: Not of gods, but of the one who rules. Sit down, pleasure–seeker!

Vasanthasena: Drink some fruit juice.

Ukrasenan: First of all, let me drink the wine of your looks, beloved!

Vasanthasena: It's a long time since we met!

Confidante: Did you call, madam?

Vasanthasena: No, you go out.

Ukrasenan: (Smoothening her hair) Ah? A gathering of clouds. *(Pointing to the teeth)* A garland of jasmine. *(Caressing the cheeks)* A gathering of roses!

Vasanthasena: Lord!

Ukrasenan: In all, the height of pleasure!

Vasanthasena: Yes. How have you planned it all?

Ukrasenan: Pleasantly! All the important places are occupied by our soldiers in the guise of ascetics. War! If only we let out a cry of command! Purushothaman will be held.

Vasanthasena: War may not be necessary. I have kept Purushothaman's soldiers under my grip.

Ukrasenan: Bravo! What, if war comes? Once the enemy forces have come into the palace, who can oppose and defeat them?

Vasanthasena: Have enemy's forces come into the palace only?

Ukrasenan: It has come into the very private chamber, hasn't it? This is not for battle, but for surrender!

Vasanthasena: I shall come tonight.

* * *

(The verandah of the prison)

Guard: Hey! Don't go there… Lady Vijaya is in labour pains.

Oh! Is that so!

(Within the prison)

Padmavathy: (Bending over the child) My richness rare! You should be sleeping in a cradle studded with diamonds, listening to a lullaby in Tamil, sung by a thou-

sand nurses. You are rolling in a shed full of hay. Of this I did not think at all!

Vijaya: Aunt!

Padmavathy: Dear! Daughter of the Pandya king! Did you come as my daughter-in-law, to suffer like this!

Vijaya: Only after my coming, you and your dear son suffered so many troubles. All these, only after this unfortunate one's arrival.

Padmavathy: Vijaya... No, my girl! If your soft feet tread, even sand will become gold! The one who made the golden mansion into a mound of dust is not you, but she, who lives in joy.

* * *

(Vasanthasena's prayer room)

Vasanthasena: How do the grapes taste?

Ukrasenan: They taste sweet wherever your fingers have touched them.

Vasanthasena: Isn't the guava fruit lesser in taste than my lips?

Ukrasenan: Is that then a lie?

Vasanthasena: My beloved! How many days are gone, since we enjoyed ourselves like this?

Ukrasenan: Beauty! I was languishing in the thought as to when I would meet you!

Vasanthasena: Lord!

Ukrasenan: Vasanthi!

Vasanthasena: Lord! Where are we now?

Ukrasenan: Darling! We are going to Heaven!

* * *

(Outside the window of the prayer room)

Vasanthan: Doctor! Doctor! Doctor!

Manokaran: What?

Vasanthan: Mother and the ascetic are going to Heaven! Come! Come! Let's go and rescue mother.

Manokaran: You go and fetch the king immediately.

Vasanthan: Ah! That's right... No doubt! No doubt.

* * *

(King's room)

Vasanthan: Father! Father!

King: What is it, fellow?

Vasanthan: Mother and the ascetic are going to Heaven!

King: Ah!

Vasanthan: Come father! Do come...

* * *

(Vasanthi's room)

Ukrasenan: Why so many lamps, Vasanthi!

Vasanthasena: Why, will a single lamp do?

Ukrasenan: Even that is not necessary, when you as the perennial lamp are nearby!

(The king comes and knocks at the door. Ukrasenan draws the sword)

Vasanthasena: No! The matter will go out of hand. I shall take care of it. Come over here.

She sends him into a room and closes the door. The door is broken open.

Vasanthasena: Who?

King: You are asking who? You traitress!.

Vasanthasena: Ah! Lord! You should not see this humble self. It is God's command!

King: What is God's command? What...? Your lustfully carrying on in the middle of the night, on the swan-shaped cot, with that mendicant rascal-- is what is God's command?

Vasanthasena: Ah! King! What the eye sees is not true! What the ear hears is not true! A thorough inquiry alone should make it clear!

King: Tut! Don't make a drama. Where is that mendicant?

Vasanthasena: He is in the world of meditation.

King: In the dream world! Worthless one! A curse on the town! You cannot still be deceiving Purushothaman.

Confidante: King! Please think calmly. Do not blame madam. She is guiltless.

King: You who have come to describe the qualities of a guiltless woman! Symbol of treachery! You bite the hand that feeds you! All these occurred because of you only. "She is going to die. Please come and save her!" You cried thus in alarm! On noble Sathyaseelan and chaste Padmavathy you brought a slur. I did not know at that time you were the accomplice hand in glove with this thief!

Confidante: Lord!

King: Tell the truth. You and this dangerous woman lived by cheating me. Is this not true? Come on! Confess!

Vasanthasena: Do not hurt her. I shall myself tell everything. I poisoned my husband. I spun a story that the unblemished Padmavathy was an unchaste woman.

King: Ah!

Vasanthasena: You wonder why I am telling you all the truths? Not to beg your

pardon by telling you all this! I do it in my mental strength that you can do nothing against me hereafter.

King: You traitress!

Vasanthasena: Am I a traitress? Keeping me only as a doll in the bedroom, you who have dashed to the ground my only ambition to conduct the coronation of my son, aren't you the traitor?

King: Coronation for your dear son! Forget that! None can rob the land of Purushothaman's successor.

Vasanthasena: Don't dream! Prepare a scroll of best wishes for the coronation of Vasanthan! The coronation of Kesarivarman's son.

King: Stop it! Stop it! You harlot!

Vasanthasena: Pity! You have known of that only now?

King: Cursed creature! Prostitute! If you are let to live, you will be blabbering! Who goes there? Come rushing! Catch her!

(The guards stand still)

Vasanthasena: Nothing doing! Your powers have set. These are my warriors. Akshaya! Arrest him!

King: Ah! You are telling them to arrest me?

Vasanthasena: Yes. I am telling them to arrest you only. That too for the last time, in royal regalia! Akshaya! Why do you stand there? Akshaya! Yes... Carry on...

(Manokaran arrests his father)

King: (Aside) Purushothama! You have buried deep the honour of your ancestors who have never shown their back in war! Your arms, which held the sword, have now handcuffs with which this traitress has locked them! Hey! my valiant land! Won't you pardon me?

* * *

(Prison)

Manokaran: A nod of the head would make princes pay their obeisance, and offer their tributes. Commanders in-chief will fiercely advance. The royal authority of that lionlike king is now behind the bars of the prison.

King: Cowards! Is there not a single warrior with gratitude to the king?

Manokaran: There are. All of them are in prison! Without bloodshed, without the clash of swords, our king has sounded the drums of victory.

King: King! The one who can't wield a spear, a blind fool who enters the battlefield with an ascetic's water jug is called a king!

Manokaran: Not like that at all! Ukrasenan is smart! He knows that to oppose Purushothaman in the bedroom, spears and shields are not required. So he has decided that saffron robes and ascetic's jugs alone will suffice.

King: Enough of that - my valour has not been sold just because I have been entrapped by a strumpet.

Manokaran: Who is a strumpet? Vasanthasena is chaste! Purest gold!

King: No! Sinner that I am, I am the one who put the purest gold into prison. Padmavathy! You are my purest gold! The sinner who has inflicted a blot upon you has received an apt prize, Padmavathy!

Manokaran: No use regretting. Vasanthan is to be crowned king tomorrow morning.

King: Vasanthan! The son of that wily woman - with a perverse brain! My fertile land's future king! Alas! Manokara! My precious one who is born to rule! The sinner who drove you to death has received the right punishment. Manokara! To you, your mother, and beloved Vijaya, I did, I did innumerable wrongs.

For all that, from whom shall I seek pardon? Where are you, Manokara! Even if I did a thousand wrongs, you would rush on your own if your father was in danger. Who will tell this to you? Manokara! Manokara! Where are you, Manokara!

Manokaran: Right here.

King: Where? Where is my Manokaran? Where is Manokaran? Manokara! Manokara!

* * *

(Palace)

Vasanthasena: Akshaya! Vijaya, lying in the prison cellar, has brought forth a child, they say.

Manokaran: Ah!

Vasanthasena: What is it, Akshaya?

Manokaran: Nothing… nothing… A bud is born at the hour of its withering!

Vasanthasena: Yes. You should nip it now.

Manokaran: Ah! What? Me?

Vasanthasena: Who is there better than you to do this? Take this right now!

(Gives him a signet ring)

Manokaran: (Aside) Am I to kill my child beloved? No… No…

(Draws the sword)

(Voice of conscience) Manokara! Stop! Don't be angry. Don't be a slave to haste. There are enemies all over the palace. Even mother is in prison. Father too is in pain… You wish to try your sword and pounce? Who will save your wife and child?

(He goes back to the prison. Original Akshayan, bound to a stone-pillar near the cave, frees himself after a struggle).

* * *

(Palace)

Vasanthasena: Let us think of tomorrow's events.

Ukrasenan: What is there to attend to hereafter?

Vasanthasena: Vasanthan's coronation ceremony takes place tomorrow.

Ukrasenan: Certainly. But before that, it should be announced that the country has come under our sway.

Vasanthasena: Any risk in such an announcement?

Ukrasenan: Risk? ... From whom?... Is there any in this world who could oppose me?

Vasanthasena: In happy exuberance, it should not be forgotten that Manokaran is still alive.

* * *

(Prison. Showing the signet ring, Manokaran enters in)

Manokaran: Mother!

Padmavathy: Who are you?

Manokaran: Manokaran sent me.

Padmavathy: Manokaran! Is my beloved son well?

Vijaya: Aunt! Where is he?

Manokaran: He who is ever in your heart, where else will he be?

Padmavathy: Who are you?

Manokaran: I will tell that later. Now, you should both escape from here.

Padmavathy: What?

Manokaran: Yes! Manokaran's secret arrangement. Here is the signet ring. Without fear, and none opposing, you could go out. Start.

Padmavathy: We should not escape in the sly. No. The king's command should not be disobeyed. Tell this to Manokaran.

Vijaya: Aunt!

Padmavathy: Boy! Tell Manokaran that my darling grandson is born in the prison.

Manokaran: I tell you to escape, only to save this grandson from danger.

Padmavathy: The queen to disobey the king's command? This is not fair.

Manokaran: In that case, Princess! Give me the child at least. I will take him away.

Vijaya: Ah? The child?

Manokaran: If the child is to be saved...?

Vijaya: Aunt! Don't believe him. Some plot is being hatched to kill him.

Manokaran: No! No!

Vijaya: No... No... you go away.

* * *

(Palace)

Soldier: King! Akshayan has come. He wishes to see you.

Vasanthasena: Has he come? ... Tell him to come here. He would have come with news of success – after killing Vijaya's child. This prize is for him. Your commander is a very smart one.

Ukrasenan: Is there any doubt? Oh! Come... Akshaya, come. What is it, Akshaya? *(The true Akshayan appears)*

Vasanthasena: Who is this? Is he Akshayan?

Ukrasenan: Yes!

Vasanthasena: Ah! No!

Akshayan: I am the true Akshayan. The one who duped you is a false Akshayan, Madam! Yes, King. They had bound me. I escaped only now.

Ukrasenan: Who had bound you?

Akshayan: Manokaran.

Vasanthasena: Ah! Manokaran? If that is so, the Akshayan who is here?

Akshayan: Manokaran!

Ukrasenan: Where is he?

Vasanthasena: He should have gone to the prison.

Ukrasenan: He should be stopped.

* * *

(Prison)

Manokaran: Here! Give me the child for a while. Should I not give even a kiss to Manokaran's child?

Vijaya: Aunt... Will you leave or not? Villain!

Manokaran: No, Vijaya! Don't you know me? *(Removes the false beard.)* Vijaya! Don't you recognize me?...

(Vasanthasena enters)

Vasanthasena: Catch him. Manokara! You can't escape this time.

Manokaran: Let us see that... *(Aims the dagger at Vasanthasena)*

Vasanthasena: Ah!

Padmavathy: Manokara! *(She stops him)*

(Manokaran stands stunned. As Ukrasenan throws a dagger, it hurts his hand).

Manokaran: All is destroyed. All is destroyed, mother!

Vasanthasena: Destruction? I have fixed a date for that too, Manokara! That great event will be at the king's palace, tomorrow morning. A ceremonial function for your child's death!

Vijaya: Aunt!... Aunt!...

Padmavathy: Vijaya!

Manokaran: Mother! Father is locked up in prison. As I could not disobey your command, I acceded to the command of this wicked woman. This sinner's hands locked him up in the prison cellar.

Vasanthasena: Take him away.

Manokaran: Mother! As father has come to know the truth, he pines to meet you and me. He sheds tears over his past cruel actions. He is deeply agitated, mother! Mother… Mother!

Padmavathy: The king is aware of the truth. My husband is aware of the truth. He is aware of the truth.

Vijaya: Aunt! What is it?

Padmavathy: Gone is darkness! Joy is come!

Vijaya: Joy... For us?... At this time?

Padmavathy: The king is aware. My husband is aware of the truth.

(Manokaran is bound to the pillar)

Vasanthasena: Manokara! We are able to chain only your body. Not your life. Very soon, it will be released, and it will reach a different world!

Manokaran: Mother! *(Ukrasenan beats him)*. Mother!

Ukrasenan: What a pity, alas! This prattling child calls for his mother!

Manokaran: Mother!

Ukrasenan: You to be pitied! Why do you call for your mother causing pain to your mouth? Wait for a while. I shall send you to the very place where your grandmother is.

Vasanthasena: No. First the child! Then, Manokaran! Right before his eyes, the apple of his eye should be dispatched. Go, Akshaya! Bring the child!

(Vasanthan comes)

Vasanthan: Brother! What is this? Who put you in chains?

Vasanthasena: Vasantha…

Ukrasenan: Come here.

Vasanthan: I won't. All this, your work, Mother! Mother, release brother, do it.

Vasanthasena: Vasantha... keep quiet. You don't know anything.

Vasanthan: I know everything. You imprisoned my dear father, aunt, sister-in-law. You have chained and beaten my brother also. I won't allow this. Brother!

Vasanthasena: Vasantha!

Vasanthan: Brother!

Vasanthasena: Vasantha, come here.

Vasanthan: Brother! Break all these chains... Let me go, mother!

(She drags him into a room)

Vasanthan: Let me go, let me go!

Vasanthasena: Be quiet. All this I do for your benefit.

Vasanthan: Ah! Chaining my brother and killing him, is it for my benefit?

Vasanthasena: Dear!... Won't you want to be king?

Vasanthan: King! No! No! Then a queen like you will come, and put me in prison. Let me die. I don't want the throne.

Vasanthasena: It is all my fate! You were born in my womb!

Vasanthan: That is why I am also worried.

Vasanthasena: Shut up.

Vasanthan: I won't.

Vasanthasena: You won't?

Vasanthan: Mother! Mother!

(She shuts the door and leaves)

***

(A guard in the prison attempts to carry away Vijaya's child)

Guard: The order is to bring the child!

Vijaya: Ah! Aunt!

Guard: Give the child.

Padmavathy: What crime is this tiny child guilty of? Except being born in a world where the wicked go about, no other crime has it committed!

Guard: We don't know about all that. The queen's command!

Vijaya: Who is the queen? You fellow! Get out... Who are you to ask for the child? Tell that depraved woman... that the Princess of the Pandya kingdom refuses to hand over the tender child, brought forth by her. If she has the courage, let her

fight directly with me and take him!

Padmavathy: Vijaya... Be patient!

Vijaya: Aunt! Do you want my child to be handed to that murderous woman! Even chicks fight against vultures which circle round to kill them. Aunt! Am I worse than them, lacking the mother's instinct? Tell them to murder me. Once my life is gone, let them then take away the symbol of my life.

(The guard, perforce, takes away the child)

Vijaya: Alas! Aunt!

Padmavathy: Don't do any harm to the child. Leave him *(The guard runs away with the child. Padmavathy follows, crying aloud)*

* * *

(In front of Manokaran)

Ukrasenan: Ah! A sacrifice like this, before the coronation takes place, is very auspicious, according to religious codes.

Vasanthasena: Yes, Vasanthan is lucky that such an opportunity has come on its own.

Ukrasenan: Chola Empire's young breeze, alas, a tender child! ... For the sin of the father, this bud is going to wither... Manokara! Look at the beautiful face of your child for once. Gather on the lips all your affection, kiss the young cheek of your child for the last time. *(The child is shown to Manokaran and taken away)* Bathe the nectarine child in your tears.

(Manokaran is agitated. The child smiles innocently).

Ukrasenan: You smile, alas, poor child! Smile heartily. You, who were born crying, are now smiling. The Pandya and Chola blood is coursing through your body. So, you will sleep gratified, in the cradle of death.

Vasanthasena: Quick! *(Ukrasenan raises the sword over the child)*

Padmavathy: Sena! *(screaming, she comes rushing)*

Vasanthasena: That is not possible! The cool scene of the child falling into the cruel mouth of Angel Death, you should see with your own eyes. Only after this, I shall derive great joy, seeing the Chola lineage break into a thousand pieces.

Padmavathy: Stop it Vasanthi, Stop it! Many years ago, you took my husband as your own, and made my life a sky without the moon. I forbore. You sat in the Ceremonial Hall, by the side of the emperor, like the queen of the empire. I forbore that too. Using cruel words, you nearly killed me; I forbore even that. Whenever, my son in anger had leaped like a tiger, I stopped the unsheathed sword, and saved your life. For what reason, you foolish woman, do you hold the beautiful child of the Chola kingdom on the edge of a sword! I ask you. Do you know for what

reason I was patient?

Vasanthasena: That is the outcome of your deeds of the previous birth.

Padmavathy: No. The love you had for my husband. You were his cherished possession. I felt that my husband should not be concerned about any harm befalling that possession. But Vasanthasena! You have locked up my very husband in prison. So, in the name of the patience I have shown so far, I ask you! You want to have the country? Take it. Go on with your rule. The woods will suffice for us. Do spare us all!

Vasanthasena: Ah! To spare you all? Don't dream! The heap of ashes of the Chola Empire will gather at my feet in half a second.

Padmavathy: Vasanthasena! If truth manifests in the form of a storm, you will be engulfed in the ashes! Beware!

Vasanthasena: You are threatening me?

Padmavathy: Yes. I do but you! The land that the rains never belied, the woods with the frolicking deers, and homes full of honey overflowing - that is the Chola kingdom. You who came begging for love! You who indulged in many sinister schemes, and you who played havoc on a beautiful life! Welcoming you, I let you live a happy life, so long! But today, you speak with haughtiness that you are for ruling over, and we are for dying! No! You invite your own end. Do not ruin yourself for nothing.

Vasanthasena: What did you say?

(Vasanthi slaps Padmavathy)

Manokaran: Mother! *(He screams)*

Padmavathy: Manokara! *(She goes to him).* Manokara! My lustrous lamp of glory! Pardon me! Whenever you rose fiercely to guard the honour of the Chola Empire, I was the sinner to dissuade you from it. My sterling son who deemed my command so sacred! But now even as your mother commands you to end injustice, you stand immobilized, my beloved! Gone! Gone! All is gone!

Manokaran: No mother...! No! my dear mother. Command me now to put an end to injustice. This is the last chance! My last request! My Tamil mother! At least, after seeing the injustice done by a jackal who is thirsting to mount the throne, won't you grant me permission? A sword is not required, mother! A word by mouth will do. No forces are required, Mother! mother's objection alone should go! No weapons are required, mother—just a signal of the eye is enough. For you, me and all of us, there will be liberty. Mother, where is the command? Please permit me. I shall finish them.

Padmavathy: My rare wealth! For your father's benefit alone, I bound your hands, and I bowed my head before this mischief monger. I counselled patience only for his sake. After his being locked up in prison, no glory there is for patience. Forbear no more, Manokara, Do rise in wrath intense!

Manokaran: Mother!

Padmavathy: You have got your mother's command. Start! Manokara! Manokara! Manokara!

(Rushing to the statue of the king)

Padmavathy: Oh! King! See how our excellent family is ruined. See Manokaran bound in chains. See Manokaran! King! King!! King!!!

(The laughter of Ukrasenan and Vasanthasena)

Padmavathy: Why are you laughing? You monkeys jumping about in a grove of red plantains! In the shape of a woman, in the form of a saint, you sinners who came to conquer the land! Those who laughed like this never did prosper. Those who wept never did fail. Thus the world would say. You who forgot history! You mean pack of jackals who came using magic means to bend the sceptre! Do not laugh! You are a crowd that cannot feel the power of tears! No sword has accomplished what tears have achieved. Do not laugh, forgetting this! Even amidst those in pain, you will sing a song. Traitors, do not laugh... do not laugh. Oh! Mother Earth! See the beautiful light of Manokaran! Oh! Chola Mother! See the cruelty of the valiant warrior who adorned your shoulders with the victory wreath, suffering in pain! The son who decorated your beauteous forehead with the dot of the alien's blood, alas! See the painful sight of his being bound by the bonds of slavedom! Oh! The Ceremonial Hall of the Cholas! How long are you going to keep victory's symbol crestfallen, amidst these useless people? Mother Earth, bearing this depraved woman who thirsts to wreak vengeance upon this tender child, upon the prince royal, upon the king who rules the world, and all the rest! If it is true that you are grateful, and if it is true that mothers from valiant dynasties have power, if it is true that the dauntless Manokaran who never bent before enemies is my son, let this chain break into pieces! Let the laughter of the unjust be silenced! Let this Hall crumble into pieces!! Crumble into pieces!!!

(Manokaran's strength topples the pillar. His mother's voice encourages him)

Ukrasenan: Catch him! Arrest him!

Vasanthasena: Stab him! Kill him !

(Ukrasenan is killed by Manokaran. Pandya's forces also arrive. The child is saved by Kesarivarman. The dagger that Vasanthi threw at Manokaran lands on Vasanthan)

Vasanthasena: Vasantha!

Vasanthan: Brother!

Manokaran: Vasantha! Vasantha! Vasantha!

Vasanthan: My brother!

Vasanthan: Brother! Can't you call me once "Younger brother"? Call *Anna*! Call me so!

Manokaran: My younger brother! *Thambi!*

Vasanthan: Brother! I can feel if the dagger thrown by this sinner had hit you how much pain you would have suffered. You should live, brother! Brother! You alone should rule the country. I should die.

(Vasanthan dies. As Manokaran attempts to kill Vasanthi)

Kesarivarman: Stop, you don't kill her. I have been waiting for this only for many years. She should not die at one stroke. She should die, inch by inch.

(The invisible being drags her to the cave. The king is released)

King (Coming towards Padmavathy) : Pardon me, Padma.

Padmavathy: Don't say like that. Here, look at our darling!

(Looking at the grandson, that laughs happily)

* * *

At another place, the invisible being tortures Vasanthi. The statue sculpted by him shatters into pieces. Vasanthi dies.

"The need for you is over". So saying, Kesarivarman throws down the herbal pot for invisibility and breaks it.

END

About the Project Makers

Bharathiar University, Coimbatore - named after the nationalist Tamil poet Subramanya Bharathi, who exhorted the Tamils to identify things worthy in their language, and give them unto the world for enjoyment and edification - conceived this Project viz., *Kalaignar in English Translation* by which to make available in English the extraordinarily rich and varied literary works of Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi, who, by the sheer volume and weight of his output, makes a compulsive demand on us that he be studied and given his due.

Prof. G. Thiruvasagam, Chairman of the Project Committee and Vice Chancellor of the University. The genesis of this Project owes to his academic vision. His initiative and leadership as much as his passionate and studied interest in the excellence of Kalaignar's creativity has seen this Project through within a short span of ten months.

Kavipperarasu Vairamuthu, Vice-Chairman of the Project Committee. An intellectual poet in Tamil endowed with an astonishingly fecund poetic energy and representing a rare blend of ratiocinative powers and aesthetic sensibility, Vairamuthu has brought a sense of direction and significance to bear on the dynamics of the Project.

Dr P. Marudanayagam and Dr V. Murugan comprising the editorial team - the former a ripe Professor of English and a comparatist of towering erudition, and the latter a bilingual lexicographer and a distinguished translator with the translations of *Tolkappiyam, Kalittokai, Tirukkural* and *Narrinai,* and *Oxford English-English-Tamil Dictionary* to his credit.

Dr C. Sivashanmugam, Professor of Linguistics, **Dr R. Palanivel**, Professor of English and **Dr S. M. Ravichandran**, Professor of Tamil, Bharathiar University, the coordinators of the Project, who kept the Project on track.

The late **Dr S. Agasthialingom,** a renowned linguist and former Vice Chancellor, Tamil University, **Sirpi Balasubramanian,** a highly decorated poet in Tamil, **Prof. Tamizhachi Thangapandian**, **Poet Kayalvizhi Venkatesh** and **Dr N. Ramani**, members of the Expert Committee, whose learned counsel, suggestions and views have added to the strength and credibility of the translations as a whole.

Macmillan Publishers India Limited, who have done an excellent job through their passionate commitment to the project, their legendary technical expertise and their unfailing feel for accuracy and perfection.

Kalaignar's Manokara is a masterful adaptation of Pammal Sambanda Mudaliar's original work named under the same title. It is done with such an adroit departure from the original that it reads like a newly written play. The rich cadences of Kalaignar's prose that had been scintillating music to the ears of a generation of filmgoers represent the 'other harmony' of verse. The gripping suspense, melodrama and love dialogues interspersed with wit and humour, swiftness of action and tear-jerking sentiments make Manokara a dramatic art work far beyond the reach of any of his contemporaries in the Tamil language.

Kalaignar M Karunanidhi, one among the select 'who is who' of contemporary India, is a ripe political personality of more than seven decade standing, a statesman and a proven administrator, with the rare distinction of being the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu for five terms, besides being a relentless crusader for rationalist revival and an undaunted, missionary-like fighter for social and political causes.

Notwithstanding, it is the title 'Kalaignar' meaning 'an artist par excellence' by which he is identified and characterized, so much so that it is no longer a title but a proform designation of Dr M Karunanidhi, in the same way as 'the Bard' is used to refer to Shakespeare.

For Karunanidhi, whose formal education did not extend beyond the secondary school, is a multifaceted, prolific writer with an amazingly large volume of literary output to his credit. He is a poet, a playwright, a novelist and short story writer, a letter writer, an elegist, a journalist and a columnist, a script-writer, a political satirist, an essayist, a translator, an autobiographer and a social and literary critic, besides being an extraordinarily eloquent and powerful speaker. His creative and critical works have been published in 59 volumes, memoirs and autobiography in another 8 volumes, and other writings in 115 more volumes, large and small.

What astounds one is the fact that he has been writing on all these genres contemporaneously, putting the same amount of interest and energy in each kind, that too in the midst of his most exacting administrative and political activities.

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